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THE TABLES OF THE LAW

THE
TABLES
OF THE
LAW
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1

HIS birth was disorderly. Therefore he passionately loved order, the immutable, the bidden, and the forbidden.

Early he killed in frenzy ; therefore he knew better than the inexperienced that, though killing is delectable, *having* killed is detestable ; he knew you should not kill.

He was sensual, therefore he longed for the spiritual, the pure, and the holy—in a word, the *invisible*—for this alone seemed to him spiritual, holy, and pure.

Among the Midianites, a nimble tribe of shepherds and merchants strewn across the desert, to whom he had to flee from Egypt, the land of his birth, because he had killed, he

made the acquaintance of a god whom one could not see but who saw you. This god was a mountain-dweller who at the same time sat invisible on a transportable chest in a tent and there dispensed oracles by the drawing of lots. To the children of Midian this numen, called Jahwe, was one god among many ; they did not bother very much about serving him. What service they undertook they did to be on the safe side, just in case. For it had occurred to them that among the gods there could possibly be a bodiless one whom one did not see, and they sacrificed to him so as not to miss anything, not to offend anybody, to forestall any unpleasantness from any quarter.

But Moses', because of his desire for the pure and the holy, was deeply impressed by the invisibility of Jahwe ; he believed that no visible god could compete in holiness with an invisible one, and he marvelled that the children of Midian attached so little importance to a characteristic which seemed to him full of immeasurable implications. While he minded the sheep belonging to the brother of his Midianite wife, he plunged himself into long, deep, and violent cogitations. He was moved by inspirations and visions which in one case even left his inner consciousness and returned

to his soul as a flaming vision from without, as a precisely-worded pronouncement, and as an unshrinkable command. Thus he reached the conviction that Jahwe was none other than El'eljon, the Only-Highest, El ro'i, the God who sees me, He who had always been known as El Schaddai, "the God of the Mountain," El 'olām, the God of the World and the Eternities—in short, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of the Fathers. And that meant the God of the poor, dumb, in their worship completely confused, uprooted, and enslaved tribes at home in Egypt, whose blood, from his father's side, flowed in the veins of Moses.

Full of this discovery, his soul heavy with command but trembling also with the wish to fulfil the mission, Moses ended his stay of many years with the children of Midian. He placed his wife Zipporah (a sufficiently noble woman because she was a daughter of Reuel, the priest-king of Midian, and the sister of his herd-owning son, Jethro) on a mule. He took along also his two sons, Gershom and Eliezer, and returned, travelling westward in seven day-journeys through many deserts, to the land of Egypt. That is to the lower land, the fallow country where the Nile

branches out into the district called Kōs, and variously known as Goschem, Gosem, and Goshen. It was here that the tribes of his fathers lived and drudged.

Here he immediately began to communicate his great experience to his kinsfolk ; he talked to them wherever he went and stood, in their huts, their grazing grounds, and their workplaces. When he spoke he had a certain way of letting his arms hang limp at his sides, while his fists shook and trembled. He informed them that the God of their Fathers was found again, that He had made himself known to him, Moscheh ben 'Amram, on the mountain Hor in the desert Sin from a bush which burned' but never burned out. This God was called Jahwe, which name is to be understood as " I am that I am, from eternity to eternity," but also as flowing air and as mighty sound. This God was inclined towards their tribe and was ready under certain conditions to enter into a covenant with them, choosing them above all other peoples. The conditions were that they would devote themselves in full exclusiveness to him, and that they would form a sworn brotherhood to serve him alone in worship of the invisible, a worship without images.

Moses stormed at them and the fists on his broad wrists trembled. Yet he was not completely honest with them, and kept under cover much, indeed the essential thought, he had in mind. Fearing he might scare them off, he said nothing of the implications of invisibility, that is, its spirituality, its purity, its holiness. He preferred not to point out that as sworn servants of the invisible they would have to be a separated people, a people of the spirit, of purity and of holiness. Afraid to frighten them he kept silent. They were so miserable, so oppressed, and in their worship so confused, this kin of his father. He mistrusted them though he loved them. Yes, when he announced to them that Jahwe the Invisible was inclined towards them, he really ascribed to the God and interpreted for the God what possibly was true of the God but what certainly was true of him: for he himself was inclined to his father's kin, as the sculptor is inclined towards the shapeless lump from which he hopes to carve a high and fine figure, the work of his hands. Hence his trembling desire, hence too the great heaviness of soul which filled him directly after his departure from Midian.

He also kept back the second half of the secret ; for it was a double secret. It included not only the message to his tribe of the rediscovery of their father's God and the God's inclination toward them ; it included also his own belief that he was destined to guide them out of Egypt's house of bondage, out into the open, and through many deserts into the land of promise, the land of their fathers. That destiny was part of the mission, inseparably linked with it. God—and liberation for the return home ; the Invisible—and release from foreign yoke : to him these were one and the same thought, but to the people he as yet said nothing of this second part of the mission, because he knew that one would inevitably follow from the other ; also because he hoped that he himself could negotiate the release with Pharaoh, King of Egypt, with whom he had not-too-remote connection.

Was it, however, that his speech displeased the people—for he spoke badly and haltingly and often could not find the right word—or did they divine, while he shook his trembling fists, the implications of invisibility as well as those of the covenant ? Did they perceive that they were being lured towards strenuous

and dangerous matters ? Whatever the reason they remained mistrustful, stiff-necked, and fearful of his storming. They ogled their Egyptian whip-masters and mumbled between their teeth :

“ Why do you spout words ? And what kind of words are these you spout ? Likely somebody set you up as chief or as judge over us ? Well, we want to know who.”

That was nothing new to him. He had heard it from them once before, before he had fled to Midian.

2

His father was not his father, nor was his mother his mother. So disorderly was his birth.

One day the second daughter of the Pharaoh Ramessu was amusing herself—under the watchful eye of the armed guard and in company of her serving maidens—in the royal garden on the Nile. There she espied a Hebrew labourer who was carrying water. She became enamoured of him. He had sad eyes, he had a young beard encircling his chin, and he had strong arms, as one could clearly

see when he drew the water. He worked by the sweat of his brow and had his troubles, but to Pharaoh's daughter he was the image of beauty and desire. She commanded that he should be admitted to her pavilion. There she plunged her precious little hands through his sweat-drenched hair, she kissed the muscles of his arms and charmed his manhood to wakefulness, so that he took possession of her ; he, the foreign slave, took possession of the child of a king. When she had had enough, she let him go. But he did not go far ; after thirty paces he was slain and quickly buried, so that nothing remained of the pleasure of the Sun-Daughter.

“ The poor man,” said she when she heard about it. “ You are always such busybodies. He would have kept quiet. He loved me.” After that she became pregnant, and after nine months she gave birth in all secrecy to a boy. Her serving woman placed the boy in a box fashioned of tarred reeds, and they hid the box in the bulrushes on the edge of the water. There in due time they found it and exclaimed, “ O magic ! A foundling, a boy from the bulrushes, an abandoned child ! It is like the old tales, exactly as it happened with Sargon, whom Akki the Water Carrier found

in the rushes and reared in the goodness of his heart. Such things happen all the time. What shall we do now with our find? It would be wisest if we gave it to a nursing mother, a woman of simple station who has milk to spare, so that the boy may grow up as her son and the son of her lawful husband." And they handed the child to a Hebrew woman who carried it down into the region of Goshen and there gave it to Jochebed, the wife of Amram, who belonged to the tribe of the Tolerated Ones, to the descendants of Levi. She was nursing her son Aaron and had milk to spare. Therefore, and also because once in a while and quite secretly substantial gifts arrived at her hut from sources higher up, did she rear the unclassified child in the goodness of her heart. Before the world Amram and Jochebed became his parents and Aaron became his brother. Amram possessed cattle and fields, Jochebed was the daughter of a stonemason. She did not know how she should name the questionable child. Therefore she gave him a half-Egyptian name, that is to say, the half of an Egyptian name. For the sons of the land were often called Ptach-Moses, Amen-Moses, or Ra-Moses. They were named as sons with the names of the gods.

Amram and Jochebed preferred to omit the name of the god, and called the child simply Moses. Thus he was called plain "Son." The only question was, whose son?

3

He grew up as one of the Tolerated Ones, and expressed himself in their dialect. The ancestors of this tribe had come into the land long ago at the time of the Drought. They whom Pharaoh's historians described as the "hungry Bedouins from Edom" had come with the due permission of the frontier officials. They had received pasture privileges in the district of Goshen in the lower land. Anybody who believes that they received these privileges for nothing does not know their hosts, the children of Egypt. Not only did they have to pay taxes out of their cattle, and that so heavily that it hurt, but also all who had strength were forced to do manual services at the several building operations which in a country like Egypt are always under way. Especially since Ramessu, the second of his name, had become Pharaoh in Thebes, excessive building was going on, for building

was his pleasure and his royal delight. He built prodigal temples all over the land. And down in the Delta region he not only renewed and greatly improved the long-neglected canal which connected the eastern arm of the Nile with the Bitter Lakes and thus the great ocean with the corner of the Red Sea, but he also constructed two arsenal cities on the banks of the canal, called Pithom and Rameses. It was for this work that the children of the Tolerated Ones were drafted. They baked bricks and carried them and drudged in the sweat of their bodies under Egypt's cudgel.

This cudgel was hardly more than a symbol of the authority vested in Pharaoh's overseers. The workers were not unnecessarily beaten with it. They also had good food with their drudgery : much fish from the Nile, bread, beer, and beef, quite as plentiful as they needed. Nevertheless, they did not take to or care for this work, for they were nomads, full of the tradition of a free, roaming life. Labour by the hour, labour which made them sweat, was foreign and insulting to their nature. The tribes, however, were far too tenuously connected and insufficiently conscious of themselves to be able to signal their dissatisfaction

to each other, or to become of one firm mind about it. Because several of their generations had lived in a transitional land, pitching their tents between the home of their fathers and the real Egypt, they were now unanchored souls, wavering in spirit and without a secure doctrine. They had forgotten much ; they had half assimilated some new thoughts ; and because they lacked real orientation, they did not trust their own feelings. They did not trust even the bitterness that they felt towards their bondage, because fish and beer and beef made them uncertain.

Moses, also, as the supposed son of Amram, was destined to form bricks for Pharaoh as soon as he had outgrown his boyhood. But this did not come to pass ; the youth was taken away from his parents and was brought to Upper Egypt into a school, a very elegant academy where the sons of the Syrian town kings and the scions of the native nobility were educated. There was he taken, because his real mother, Pharaoh's child, who had delivered him into the bulrushes, was, though somewhat lascivious, not devoid of sentiment. She had remembered him for the sake of his buried father, the water carrier with the beard and the sad eyes. She didn't want Moses to

remain with the savages, but wished him to be educated as an Egyptian and to achieve a court position. His half descent from the gods was thus to be half recognized in silence. Clothed in white linen and with a wig on his head, Moses acquired the knowledge of stars and of countries, the art of writing and of law. Yet he was not happy among the snobs of the elegant academy, but lonely was he among them, filled with aversion towards all of Egypt's refined culture. The blood of the buried one who had been sacrificed to this culture was stronger in him than was his Egyptian portion. In his soul he sided with the poor uncertain ones at home in Goshen, who did not even have the courage of their bitterness. He sided with them against the lecherous arrogance of his mother's kin.

“What was your name again?” his comrades at the school asked him.

“I am called Moses,” he answered.

“Ach-Moses or Ptach-Moses?” they asked.

“No, simply Moses,” he responded.

“That's inadequate and paltry,” said the snobs. And he became enraged, so that he almost wanted to kill and bury them. For he understood that with these questions they simply wished to pry into his uncertain history,

which in nebulous outlines was known to everybody. He himself could hardly have known that he was the discreet result of Egyptian pleasure, if it had not been common though somewhat inexact knowledge. Pharaoh himself was as well aware of the trifling escapade of his child as was Moses of the fact that Ramessu, the master builder, was his illegitimate grandfather, and that his paternity was the result of iniquitous, lecherous, and murderous pleasure. Yes, Moses knew this, and he also knew that Pharaoh knew it. And when he thought about it he inclined his head menacingly, inclined it in the direction of Pharaoh's throne.

4

When he had lived two years among the whelps of the school in Thebes, he could stand it no longer, fled by night over the wall, and wandered home to Goshen to his father's tribe. With severe countenance he roamed among them, and one day he saw at the canal near the new buildings in Rameses how an Egyptian overseer beat with his cudgel one of

the workers, who probably had been lazy or obdurate. Moses paled. With flaming eyes he challenged the Egyptian, who in short response smashed his nose so that Moses all his life had a nose with a broken flattened bridge. Moses seized the cudgel from the overseer, swung it mightily, and demolished the man's skull so that he lay dead on the spot. Not even once did Moses glance about to find out if anybody had observed him. Fortunately it was a lonely place and not a soul was near. Alone he buried the murdered man ; for he whom Moses had defended had instantly taken to his heels. After it was over, he felt that killing and burying were what he had always desired in his soul.

His flaming deed remained hidden at least from the Egyptians, who never did find out what had become of their man. A year and a day passed over the deed. Moses continued to roam among his people and to probe into their frays with a peculiar air of authority. So it happened that once he saw two slaves quarrelling with each other. They were at the point of violence. "Wherefore do you quarrel and seek to strike each other ?" he said to them. "Are you not miserable enough and neglected ? Would it not be better for

kin to side with kin, instead of baring your teeth to each other ? This one is in the wrong: I saw it. Let him give in and be content ; nor let the other triumph."

But as usually happens, suddenly both of them were united against him, and they said, " What business is it of yours ? " Especially he who was in the wrong was extremely snappy and shouted quite loudly, " Well, this caps everything ! Who are you that you stick your ugly nose into things that don't concern you ? Ahah ! You are Moscheh, son of Amram, but that means very little. Nobody really knows who you are, not even you yourself. Curious are we to learn who has appointed you master and judge over us. Perhaps you want to choke me too, as you choked the Egyptian and buried him ? "

" Be quiet," whispered Moses, alarmed. And he thought, " How did this get out ? " But that very day he understood that it would be no longer possible for him to remain in the country, and he fled across the frontier where the frontier had a loophole, near the muddy shallows of the Bitter Lakes. Through many deserts of the land of Sinai he wandered, and came to Midian, to the Midianites, and to their priest-king, Reuel.

5

When he returned to Egypt, fraught with his discovery and his mission, he was a man at the height of his powers, sturdy, with a sunk-in nose and prominent cheek-bones, with a divided beard, eyes set far apart, and wrists that were unusually broad. He had a habit when he meditated of covering his mouth and beard with his right hand, and it was then that those broad wrists were especially noticeable. He went from hut to hut and from workplace to workplace, he shook his fists at the sides of his body and discoursed on the Invisible One, the God of the Fathers, who was ready for the covenant. Actually Moses did not speak well. His nature was halting and pent-up, and when he became excited he was apt to stammer. Nor was he master of any one language, but floundered in three. The Aramaic-Syro-Chaldee, which was the language of his father's kin and which he had learned from his parents, had been glossed over by the Egyptian which he had had to learn at school. And to this was added the

Midianitic-Arabic which he had spoken so long in the desert. All of these he jumbled together.

Very helpful to him was his brother Aaron, a tall man with a black beard and with black curls at the nape of his neck. Aaron was gentle and held his large and curved eyelids piously lowered. Moses had initiated Aaron into all his beliefs and had won him over completely to the cause of the Invisible and all its implications. Because he knew how to speak from under his beard fluently and unctuously, he accompanied Moses on his preaching tours and did the talking for him. Admittedly, he spoke in a somewhat oily fashion, and not nearly transportingly enough to suit Moses, so that Moses, accompanying the speech with his shaking fists, sought to put more fire into his brother's words, and sometimes would blurt helter-skelter into the oration with his own Aramaic-Egyptian-Arabic.

Aaron's wife was named Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab. She too partook of the oath and the propaganda, and so did a younger sister of Moses and Aaron called Miriam, an inspired woman who knew how to sing and play the timbrel. Moses was especially fond of yet another disciple, a youth who devoted

himself body and soul to his plans, and who never left his side. His real name was Hosea, son of Nun (that means "fish"), of the kin of Ephraim. Moses, however, had given him the Jahwe name, Jehoschua—Joshua for short. Joshua was erect and sinewy and curly-headed, had a prominent Adam's-apple and a clearly defined wrinkle between his brows. He carried his new name with pride, though he had his own views of the whole affair, views which were not so much religious as military. For him Jahwe, God of the Fathers, was first of all God of the fighting forces. The idea connected with the God, that is, the idea of flight from the house of bondage, was to him identical with the idea of the conquest of a new grazing ground which would belong solely to the Hebraic tribes. This was logical enough, for they had to live somewhere and nobody was going to hand them any land, promise or not, as a gift.

Joshua, young as he was, carried all the salient facts in his clear-eyed, curly head, and discussed them unceasingly with Moses, his older friend and master. Without having the means of carrying out an exact census, Joshua was able to calculate that the strength of the tribes tenting in Goshen or living in the

slave cities, Pithom and Rameses, and including also the slaves who were farflung over the country, was about twelve or thirteen thousand people. This meant that there were possibly three thousand men capable of bearing arms. Later on these figures were immeasurably exaggerated, but Joshua knew them fairly correctly, and was little satisfied with them. Three thousand men—that was no terror-inspiring fighting force, even if you counter on the fact that once on the way several kindred tribes roaming the desert would join them for the sake of winning new land. With such a force one could not dream of any major expeditions ; with such a force it was impractical to hew one's way into the promised land. Joshua well understood that. His plan, therefore, was to seek first of all a spot in the open, a marking time and resting place, where the tribes could settle and devote themselves to the business of natural multiplication under more or less favourable circumstances. This natural growth amounted to—as Joshua knew his people—two and a half per cent. per year. The youth constantly was on the lookout for such a hedged-in hatching place where they could grow further fighting forces. In his frequent consultations with

Moses it appeared that Joshua saw with surprising clarity where one place in the world lay in relation to another place. He carries in his head a kind of map of all the interesting districts ; he knew their dimensions measured in daytime marches, their watering places, and especially the fighting strength of their inhabitants.

Moses knew what a treasure he possessed in Joshua, knew also that he would have need of him, and loved his ardour, though he was little concerned with the immediate objectives of that ardour. Covering mouth and beard with his right hand, he listened to the strategic theories of the youth, thinking all the while of something else. For him also Jahwe meant an exodus, but not an exodus for a war of land seizure ; an exodus rather for seclusion. Out in the open Moses would have his father's kin to himself, those swaying souls confused in their beliefs, the procreating men, the nursing women, the awakening youths, the dirty-nosed children. There in the open he would be able to imbue them with the holy, invisible God, the pure and spiritual God ; there he could give them this God as the centre which would unite and form them, form them to his image, form them into a people different

from all other peoples ; a people belonging to God, denoted by the holy and the spiritual, and distinguished from all others through awe, restraint, and fear of God. That is to say that his people would hold in awe a restraining, pure, spiritual code, a code which, since the Invisible One was in truth the God of the entire world, would in the future bind and unite all peoples, but would at first be given to them alone and be their stern privilege among the heathen.

Thus was Moses's inclination towards his father's blood ; it was the sculptor's inclination, and he identified it with the God's choice and the God's desire for the covenant. Because Moses believed that the education towards God must precede all other enterprises, such enterprises as the young Joshua carried in his head, and because he knew that such education would take time—free time out in the open—he did not mind that there was so far many a hitch to Joshua's plans, that these plans were thwarted by an insufficient number of fighters. Joshua needed time so that his people could multiply in a natural way ; he also needed time so that he himself could become older, old enough to set himself up as commander in chief. Moses needed time

for the work of education, which for the God's sake he desired. So they both agreed, if for different reasons.

6

In the meantime he, God's delegate, and his immediate followers, the eloquent Aaron, Elisheba, Miriam, Joshua, and a certain Caleb, who was Joshua's bosom friend, of the same age, and also a strong, simple, courageous youth—in the meantime, they were not idle, not a single day. They were busy spreading Jahwe's message and his flattering offer of alliance among their people. They continued to stoke the people's bitterness against slavery under the Egyptian cudgel, and they planted ever deeper the thought that the yoke must be thrown off through migration. Each of them did it in his own way : Moses himself through halting words and shaking fists ; Aaron in unctuously flowing speech, Elisheba with persuasive chatter ; Joshua and Caleb in the form of military command, in short and terse slogans ; and Miriam, who was soon known as " the Prophetess," in elevated

tone to the accompaniment of the timbrel. Their preaching did not fall on barren ground. The thought of allying themselves with Moses's agreeable god to become the chosen people of the Invisible One and under his and his proclaimer's banner to depart for the open—this thought took root among the tribes and began to be their uniting centre. This especially because Moses promised, or at least put it forth as a hopeful possibility, that he would be able to obtain the permission for their departure from Egypt through negotiations in the highest place, so that this departure would not have to take the form of a daring uprising, but of an amicable agreement. The tribes knew if inexactly, Moses's half-Egyptian birth in the bulrushes. They knew, too, of his elegant education and of his ambiguous connections with the court. What used to be a cause of distrust and aversion, namely the fact that he was half foreign, and stood with one foot in Egypt; now became a source of confidence and lent him authority. Surely, if anybody, he was the man to stand before Pharaoh and plead their cause. And so they commissioned him to attempt to obtain their release from Ramessu, the master builder and master. They commissioned both him and his

foster brother, Aaron. Moses planned to take Aaron along first because he himself could not speak fluently while Aaron could ; but also because Aaron had at his disposal certain tricks with which he hoped to make an impression at court in Jahwe's honour. He could take a hooded snake and by pressing its neck make it rigid as a rod. Yet as soon as he cast this rod to the ground, it would curl up and " it became a serpent." Neither Moses nor Aaron took into account the fact that these miracles were quite well known to Pharaoh's magicians, and that they therefore could hardly serve as frightening proof of Jahwe's power.

Altogether, they did not have much luck—it may as well be mentioned beforehand—craftily as they had planned their campaign in counsel with the youths Joshua and Caleb. In this council it had been decided to ask the king for permission only that the Hebrew people might assemble and voyage three days across the frontier into the desert so that they could there hold a feast of offering to the god who had called them. Then they would return to work. They did not expect, of course, that Pharaoh would swallow such a subterfuge and really believe that they would return. It

was simply a mild and polite form in which to submit their petition for emancipation. Yet the king did not thank them for it.

However, it must be counted to the credit of the brothers that at least they succeeded in getting into the Great House and before Pharaoh's throne. And that not once but again and again for tenaciously prolonged conferences. In this Moses had not promised too much to his people, for he counted on the fact that Ramessu was his secret and illegitimate grandfather, and that they both knew that each knew it. Moses had a trump card in his hand which, if it was not sufficient to achieve from the king permission for the exodus, was at least potent enough to grant him audience again and again with the mighty one. For he feared Moses. To be sure, a king's fear is dangerous, and Moses was playing a dangerous game. He was courageous—how very courageous and what impression he was able to make through this courage on his people, we shall soon see. It would have been easy for Ramessu to have had Moses quietly strangled and buried, so that at last really nothing would remain of his child's escapade. But the princess cherished a sentimental memory of that hour, and very obviously did

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not want harm to befall her bulrush boy. He stood under her protection, ungrateful as he had been for her solicitude and for all her plans of education and advancement.

Thus Moses and Aaron were able to stand before Pharaoh, even if he refused categorically the festival-vacation out into the open to which their god had supposedly summoned them. It availed nothing that Aaron spoke with unctuous logic, while Moses shook his fists passionately. It availed nothing that Aaron changed his rod into a snake, for Pharaoh's magicians without further ado did the same thing, proving thereby that the Invisible One in whose name both of them were talking could claim no superior powers, and that Pharaoh need not listen to the voice of such a lord.

“But pestilence or the sword shall visit our people if we do not voyage three days and prepare a feast for our God,” said the brothers.

The king responded, “That is not my affair. You are numerous enough, more than twelve thousand strong, and you will be able to stand some diminution, whether it be by pestilence or sword or hard work. What you, Moses and Aaron, really want is to permit slothfulness to your people, and to allow them to idle

in their lawful labours. But that I cannot suffer nor permit. I have several unprecedented temples in work ; furthermore I want to build a third arsenal city in addition to Pithom and Rameses. For that I need the arms of your people. I am obliged to you for your fluent recital, and you, Moses, I dismiss more or less with particular favour. But not a word more of desert festivals."

The audience was terminated, and not only did it result in nothing good but it afterwards had a decidedly bad consequences. For Pharaoh, his zeal for building affronted, and annoyed because he could not very well strangle Moses to death—for otherwise his daughter would have made a scene—issued the order that the people of Goshen were to be more pressed with labour than before, and that the cudgel was not to be spared should they be dilatory ; on the contrary, they should be made to slave until they fell exhausted, so that all idle thoughts of a desert festival would be driven out of them. Thus it happened. The drudgery became harder from one day to the next for the very reason that Moses and Aaron had talked to Pharaoh. For example, the straw which they needed for the glazing of bricks was no longer furnished to them. They

themselves had to go into the fields to gather the stubbles, nor was the number of bricks to be delivered diminished. That number had to be reached or the cudgel danced upon their poor backs. In vain did the Hebrew foremen protest to the authorities because of the exorbitant demands. The answer was, " You are lazy, lazy are you. Therefore you cry and say, ' We want to migrate and make offerings.' The order remains: Gather the straw yourselves—and make the same number of bricks."

7

For Moses and Aaron this was no small embarrassment. The foremen said to them, " There you have it. And this is all the good the pact with your god has done us. Nothing have you accomplished except that you have made our savour worse before Pharaoh and his servants, and that you have given the sword into their hands for them to slaughter us."

It was difficult to answer, and Moses had heavy hours alone with the god of the thorn bush. He confronted the god with the fact

that from the very beginning he was against this mission, and from the beginning he had implored that whomsoever the god wanted to send, he should not in any case send him, for he could not speak properly. But the god answered him that Aaron was eloquent. True enough, Aaron had done the speaking, but in much too oily a fashion, and it appeared how absurd it was to undertake such a cause if one had a heavy tongue and was forced to have others plead as deputy. But the god consoled Moses and meted punishment to him from his own soul. He answered Moses from his own soul that he should be ashamed of his half-heartedness. His excuses were pure affectation, for at bottom he himself had longed for the mission, because he himself was as much inclined towards his people and the forming of them as the god. Yes, it was impossible to distinguish his own inclination from the inclination of the god ; it was one and the same. This inclination had driven him to the work, and he should be ashamed to be despondent at the first misadventure.

Moses let himself be persuaded, the more so as in counsel with Joshua, Caleb, Aaron, and the inspired women they reached the conclusion that the greater oppression, though

it did cause bad blood, was, rightly understood, not such a bad beginning. For the bad blood would form itself not only against Moses but also and especially against the Egyptians. It would make the people all the more receptive to the call of the saving God and to the idea of the exodus. Thus did it happen. Among the workers the discontent caused by straw and bricks was fomented, and the accusation that Moses had made their savour worse before Pharaoh and had only harmed them took second place to the wish that Amram's son should once again exploit his connections and once again go for them to Pharaoh.

This he did, but not with Aaron. Alone he went, not caring how haltingly he spoke. He shook his fists before the throne and demanded in stammering and plunging words permission for the exodus for the sake of the festival in the desert. Not once did he do so but a dozen times, for Pharaoh simply could not deny him admission to his throne, so excellent were his connections. It came to a combat between Moses and the king, a tenacious and protracted combat, the result of which was not that the king agreed to the petition and permitted the departure, but rather that one day he drove and chased the people of Goshen from his

land, very glad to get rid of them. There has been much talk about this combat and the various threatening measures which were employed against the stubbornly resisting king. This talk is not entirely without basis, though it has been subjected to much ornamentation. Tradition speaks of ten plagues, one after the other, with which Jahwe smote Egypt, in order to wear down Pharaoh, while at the same time he purposely hardened Pharaoh's heart against Moses's demands, for the sake of proving his might with ever-new plagues. Blood, frogs, vermin, wild beasts, boils, pestilence, hail, locusts, darkness, and death of the first-born, these were the names of the ten plagues. And any or all of them could have happened. The question is only whether any of them, excepting the last, which has an opaque and never fully elucidated explanation, did contribute materially to the final result. Under certain circumstances the Nile takes on a blood-red colouring. Temporarily its waters becomes undrinkable and the fish die. That is as likely to happen as that the frogs of the marshes multiply unnaturally or that the propagation of the constantly present lice grows to the proportion of a general affliction. There were plenty of lions left in Egypt prowling

along the edge of the desert and lurking in the dried-up stream beds of the jungle. And if the number of their rapacious attacks on man and beast suddenly increased, one could very well designate that as a plague. How usual are sores and blains in the land of Egypt, and how easily uncleanliness causes cankers which fester among the people like a pestilence ! The heavens there are usually blue, and therefore the rare and heavy thunderstorm makes all the deeper an impression, when the descending fire of the clouds mixes with the sharp gravel of the hail, which flails the harvest and rends the trees asunder—all this without any definite purpose. The locust is an all-too-familiar guest ; against their mass advance man has invented many a repellent and barricade. Yet again and again these yield to greed, so that whole regions remain gaping in bare baldness. And he who has experienced the dismal darkling mood which a shadowed sun produces on the earth can well understand that a people spoiled by the luxury of light would give to such an eclipse the name of a plague.

With this all the reported evils are accounted for. For the tenth evil, the death of the first-born, does not properly belong among them.

It represents a dubious by-product of the exodus itself, one into which it is uncomfortable to probe. Some of the others, or even all of them, if spread over a sufficient period of time could have occurred. One need consider them as merely more or less decorative circumlocutions of the only actual pressure which could use against Ramessu, namely and Moses quite simply the fact that Pharaoh was his illegitimate grandfather and that Moses had the means to bruit this scandal abroad. The king was more than once at the point of yielding to this pressure ; at least he made considerable concessions. He consented that the men depart for the feast of offering if their wives, children, and cattle remained behind. Moses did not accept this ; with young and old, with sons and daughters, with sheep and cows, would they have to depart, to do justice to the feast of the Lord. So Pharaoh conceded wives and brood and excepted only the cattle, which were to remain as forfeit. But Moses asked where they were expected to find offerings to be burned and slaughtered if they lacked their cattle. Not one single hoof, he demanded, might remain behind, whereby, of course, it became apparent that it was not a question of a holiday but of a departure.

This resulted in a last stormy scene between His Egyptian Majesty and Jahwe's delegate. During all the negotiations Moses had shown great patience, though there was fist-shaking rage in his soul. It got to the point that Pharaoh staked all and literally showed him the door. "Out," he screamed, "and beware lest you come again into my sight. If you do, so shall you die."

Then Moses who had just been fiercely agitated, became completely calm, and answered only, "You have spoken. I shall go and never again come into your sight." What he contemplated when he thus took leave in terrible calm was not according to his desire. But Joshua and Caleb, the youths, they liked it well.

8

This is a dark chapter, one to be voiced only in half-whispered and muffled words. A day came, or more precisely a night, a wicked vesper, when Jahwe or his destroying angel went about and smote the children of Egypt with the tenth and last plague. That is, he smote a part of them, the

Egyptian element among the inhabitants of Goshen and those of the towns of Pithom and Rameses. Those huts and houses whose posts were painted with the sign of blood he omitted, passed by, and spared.

What did he do? He caused death to come, the death of the Egyptian first-born, and in doing so he may well have met half-way many a secret wish and helped many a second-born to the right which would otherwise have been denied him. One has to note the difference between Jahwe and his destroying angel. It was not Jahwe himself who went about, but his destroying angel, or more properly, a whole band of such, carefully chosen. And if one wishes to search among the many for one single apparition, there is much to point to a certain straight, youthful figure with a curly head, a prominent Adam's-apple, and a determined, wrinkled brow. He becomes the traditional type of the destroying angel, who at all times is glad when unprofitable negotiations are ended and deeds begin.

During Moses's tenacious audiences with Pharaoh, the preparations for decisive deeds had not been neglected. Moses's part in them was limited: he merely sent his wife and sons

secretly to Midian to his brother-in-law, Jethro. Expecting serious trouble, he did not wish to be burdened with their care. Joshua, however, whose relationship to Moses was recognizably similar to the relationship of the destroying angel to Jahwe, had acted according to his nature ; though he did not possess the means or as yet the prestige to get three thousand arm-bearing comrades ready for war under his command, he at least had selected a group, had armed them, exercised them, and reared them in discipline. For a beginning, a good deal could be accomplished with them.

What then occurred is shrouded in darkness—the very darkness of that certain vesper night which was supposed to be a holiday night for the slave tribes. The Egyptians assumed that these tribes wanted to have some compensation for the festival in the desert which had been denied to them, and thus had planned to hold a celebration enhanced by feasting and illumination. For they had even borrowed gold and silver vessels from their Egyptian neighbours. Instead of this there occurred that appearance of the destroying angel, that death of the first-born, in all those dwellings unmarked with blood by the bundle of hyssop.

It was a visitation which caused so great a confusion, and so sudden a revolution of legal claims and property rights, that in the next hour the way out of the land not only stood open to the people of Moses, but they were actually forced on the way. Their departure could not be quick enough for the people of Egypt. Indeed, it seems as if the second-born were less zealous to avenge the death of those to whose place they succeeded than to hasten the disappearance of those who had caused their advancement.

The word of history has it that the tenth plague at last broke Pharaoh's pride so that he dismissed Moses's people from bondage. Soon enough, however, he sent after the departed ones a pursuing armed division which miraculously came to grief.

Be that as it may, it is certain that the exodus took the form of expulsion. The haste with which it happened is indicated by the fact that nobody had time to leaven his bread for the journey. The people were provided only with unleavened emergency cakes. Later Moses formed of this occurrence a memorial feast for all time. But in other respects everybody, great and small, were quite prepared for the departure. While the destroying angel went about, they sat with girded loins

near their fully packed carts, their shoes already on their feet, their staffs in their hands. The gold and silver vessels which they had borrowed from the children of the land they took with them.

My friends, at the departure from Egypt there was killing and there was theft. It was Moses's determined will that this should happen for the last time. How can people free themselves from uncleanness without offering to that uncleanness a last tribute, without soiling themselves thoroughly for the last time? Now Moses had the unformed mass, his father's kin, out in the open. He, with his sculptor's desire, believed that out in the open, out in freedom, the work of cleansing could begin.

9

The migrants, though their number was much smaller than the legend narrates, were yet numerous enough to be difficult to manage, to guide, and to provision. They were a heavy enough burden for him who had the responsibility for their fate and for their survival out in the open. The tribes

chose the route which chose itself, for with good reason they wanted to avoid the Egyptian frontier fortifications, which began north of the Bitter Lakes. The way they took led through the Salt Lake district, a district into which projects the larger, more westerly of the two arms of the Red Sea. These arms frame the Sinai peninsula. Moses knew this district because on his flight to Midian and on his return from there he had passed and repassed it. Its characteristics were better known to him than to young Joshua, who knew it only as a map he had learned by heart. Moses had seen these strange reedy shallows, which sometimes formed an open connection between the Bitter Lakes and the sea, and which at other times and under certain peculiar conditions could be traversed as dry land. If there was a strong east wind and if the sea was at low tide, the shallows permitted free passage. The fugitives found them in this condition, thanks to Jahwe's favourable disposition.

Joshua and Caleb were the ones who spread the news among the multitude that Moses, calling to God, had held his rod over the waters, had caused the waters to divide and make way for the people. Very probably

Moses actually did this, and thus assisted the east wind with solemn gesture and in Jahwe's name. In any case, the faith of the people in their leader could at this moment well do with confirmation, because right here it was subjected to the first heavy trial. For it was here that Pharaoh's mighty battalion, the mounted men in those grim, scythe-studded chariots all too familiar to the people, caught up with the fugitives and were within a hair's breadth of putting a bloody end to the whole pilgrimage to God.

The news of their coming, announced by Joshua's rear guard, caused extreme terror and wild despair among the people. Regret at having followed "that man Moses" immediately flared up, and the mass murmuring arose which was to occur, to his grief and bitterness, at every succeeding difficulty. The women whined, the men cursed and shook their fists at the sides of their bodies as Moses himself was wont to do when he was excited.

"Were there no graves in Egypt," thus was the speech, "which we could have entered peacefully at our appointed hour if we had stayed at home?" Suddenly Egypt was "home," that very Egypt which used to be the

foreign land of slavery. "For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness."

This Moses had to hear from a thousand throats. The cries even galled his joy in the deliverance, which when it came was overwhelming. He was "the man Moses who has led us out of Egypt"—which phrase was a paean of praise as long as everything went well. When things went badly the phrase immediately changed colour and became a menacingly murmured reproach, a reproach never far removed from the thought of stoning.

Well, then, after a short fright everything went miraculously and shamefully well. Through God's miracle Moses stood before his people in all his greatness and was "the man who has led us out of Egypt," once again with a different connotation. The people pushed through the dry shallows, after them the might of the Egyptian chariots. Suddenly the wind dies down, the flood returns, and man and horse perish gurgling in the engulfing waters.

The triumph was unprecedented. Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, played the timbrel and led the round dance of the women. She sang: "Praise the Lord—a wondrous

deed—steed and man—he has flung them into the ocean.” She had written this herself. One has to imagine it to the accompaniment of the timbrel.

The people were deeply moved. The words “mighty, holy, terrifying, praiseworthy, and miracle-dispensing” fell incessantly from their lips, and it was not clear whether these words were meant for the divinity or for Moses, delegate of the god. For they now believed that it was Moses’s rod which had drawn the drowning flood over the might of Egypt. This substitution was ever present. At those times when the people were not murmuring against him, he always had his troubles trying to prevent them from looking on him as God instead of as God’s proclaimer.

10 At the bottom this was not so ridiculous. For what Moses began to exact of those wretched people went far beyond the humanly customary, and could hardly have sprung from the brain of a mortal. They stood agape at hearing it. He immediately forbade Miriam’s dance of triumph and all

further jubilation over the destruction of the Egyptians. He proclaimed : Jahwe's heavenly hosts were at the point of joining in the song of victory, but the holy one had rebuked them. " How so ! My creatures sink into the sea, and you want to sing ? " This short and surprising pronouncement Moses spread among the people. And he added, " Thou shalt not rejoice over the fall of thine enemy, nor shall thy heart be glad over his misfortune." This was the first time he addressed the entire mob, some twelve thousand people with three thousand capable of bearing arms, with " Thou." It was a form of speech which embraced them in their entirety and at the same time designated each individual, man and woman, the aged and the child, pointing a finger against each one's breast.

" Thou shalt not utter a cry of joy over the fall of thine enemy." That was to the highest degree unnatural ! But obviously this unnaturalness had some relation to the invisibility of Moses's god, who desired also to be their god. The more thinking-ones among the dark-skinned mob began dimly to perceive what it meant to have allied themselves with an invisible god, and what uncomfortable and exigent matters they could expect.

The people were now in the land of Sinai, in the desert of Shur, an unlovely region which once left behind would only lead to yet another lamentable district, the desert of Paran. Why these deserts had different names is inexplicable. Barrenly they joined one another, and were both quite the same, that is, stony, waterless, and fruitless—accursed plains, dotted with dead hills, stretching for three days or four or five. It was lucky for Moses that he had fortified his reputation by impressing them with the supernatural occurrences at the shallows. For soon enough was he again “that Man Moses who has led us out of Egypt,” which meant “into misfortune.” Loud murmurings rose to his ears. After three days the water which they had taken along gave out. Thousands thirsted, the inexorable sun above their heads, and under their feet bare disconsolateness, whether it was the desert Shur or by this time the desert Paran.

“What shall we drink?” they called loudly, without consideration for the leader, who suffered because he was responsible. Gladly would he have wished that he alone had nothing to drink, that he alone would never drink again, if only he did not have to hear

continually, "Why did you carry us forth out Egypt?" To suffer alone is little torment compared to the trial of having to be responsible for such a multitude. Moses was a much tried man, and remained so all his life, tried more than all the other people on earth.

'Very soon there was nothing more to eat, for how long could the flat cakes which they had taken with them last? "What shall we eat?" Now this cry arose, tearful and abusing, and Moses had heavy hours alone with God. He complained how unfair it was that God had placed all the burden of all the people on one servant alone, on Moses.

"Did I conceive all these people and give them birth," he asked, "so that you have the right to say to me, 'Carry them in your arms'? Where can I find the nourishment to give to all? They cry before me and speak, 'Give us meat that we may eat!' Alone I cannot bear the weight of so many people; it is too heavy for me. And if you demand this of me, it would be better that you strangle me to death so that I need not see their misfortune and mine."

Jahwe did not entirely leave him in the lurch. On the fifth day they espied on a high plateau a spring surrounded by trees, which

incidentally was marked as the “spring Marah” on the map which Joshua carried in his head. Unfortunately, the water tasted vile, because of certain unsalutary additions. This caused bitter disappointment and far-rumbling murmurs. However, Moses, made inventive by necessity, inserted a kind of filter apparatus which held back the foul additions, if not entirely, at least largely. Thus he performed the miracle of the spring, which changed the plaints into paeans and did much to cement his reputation. The phrase, “He who has led us out of Egypt,” immediately took on again a rosy glow.

A miracle occurred also with the nourishment, a miracle which at first caused exultant astonishment. It appeared that great stretches of the desert Paran were covered with a lichen which was edible. This “manna-lichen” was a sugary tomentum, round and small, looked like coriander seed and like bdellium, and was highly perishable. If one did not eat it at once, it began to smell evil. But otherwise it made quite tolerable emergency food, mashed and powdered and prepared like an ash cake. Some thought that it tasted almost like rolls with honey; others it reminded of oil cakes.

This was the first favourable judgment, which did not last. Soon, after a few days, the people became wearied of this manna and tired of staying their hunger with it. Because it was their only nourishment, they sickened of it ; it made them nauseated and they complained, " We remember the fish which we got in Egypt for nothing, the squash, the cucumbers, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. But now our souls are weary, for our eyes see nothing but manna." This, in addition of course to the question, " Why did you carry us forth out of Egypt ? " Moses had to hear in pain. What he asked God was, " What shall I do with the people ? They no longer want their manna. You will see, soon they shall stone me."

11

However, from such a fate he was tolerably well protected by Jehoschua, his youth, and by the able guards whom he already had called on in Goshen and who surrounded the liberator as soon as the menacing murmurs rose among the crowd. For the time being this armed guard was small and

consisted only of young men, with Caleb as lieutenant. Joshua was waiting for the right occasion to set himself up as commander in chief and leader of the battle, and to bind into a regular military force under his command *all* those capable of bearing arms, all the three thousand. He knew that such an occasion was coming.

Moses owed much to the youth whom he had baptized in the name of God. Without him he would have been lost many a time. He himself was a spiritual man and his virility, though it was strong and sturdy, though it had wrist's as broad as a stonemason's, was a spiritual virility, a virility turned inward, nourished and fired by God, unconscious of outer happenings, concerned only with the holy. With a kind of foolhardiness, which stood in peculiar contrast to his reflective musings when he covered mouth and beard with his hand, all his thoughts and endeavours dealt only with his desire to have his father's kin alone for himself in seclusion, so that he might educate them, and sculpt into God's image the amorphous mass which he loved. He was little or not at all concerned with the dangers of freedom, the difficulties of the desert, and with the question how one could

safely steer such a crowd out of the desert. He did not even know precisely to what spot he must guide the people. In short, he had hardly prepared himself for practical leadership. Therefore he could be doubly glad to have Joshua at his side, who in turn admired the spiritual virility in his master and placed his own direct, realistic, and useful virility unconditionally at his disposal.

It was thanks to him that they made planned progress through the wilderness and did not stray or perish. He determined the direction of the marches according to the stars, calculated the distances of the marches, and arranged it so that they arrived at watering places at bearable if sometimes even just bearable intervals. He it was who had found out that the round lichen was edible. In short, he looked after the reputation of the leader and master. He saw to it that when the phrase, "He who has led us out of Egypt," became a murmur, it would soon again take on a laudatory meaning. He kept the goal clearly in his head, and there he steered with the help of the stars and in accord with Moses, on the shortest route. Both of them were agreed that a first provisional goal was needed. Even if this was a temporary shelter, it would

be an abode where one could live and where one could gain time. Much time had to be gained, partly (in Joshua's view) that the people might multiply and furnish him as he grew older a stronger number of warriors ; partly (in Moses's view) that he might lead the mass towards God and hew them into a shape that would be holy, decent, and clean. For this his soul and his wrists longed.

The goal was the oasis Kadesh. Just as the desert Shur touches the desert Paran, so does the desert Sin adjoin Paran in the south. But not on all sides and not closely. Somewhere in between lay the oasis of Kadesh. This oasis was like a precious meadow, a green refreshment amid waterless waste, with three strong springs and quite a number of smaller springs, a day's march long and half a day's march broad, covered with fresh pasture and arable ground, an enticing landscape rich in animals and in fruits and large enough to quarter and nourish a multitude like theirs.

Joshua knew of this attractive spot : it was scrupulously marked out on the map which he carried in his head. Moses too had heard something about it. But it was really Joshua who had contrived to select Kadesh as their

destination. His opportunity—it lay there. It goes without saying that such a pearl as Kadesh was not without its owner. The oasis was in firm possession. Well, perhaps not too firm, Joshua hoped. To acquire it, one had to fight those who possessed it, and that was Amalek.

A part of the tribe of Amalek held Kadesh occupied and would most certainly defend it. Joshua made it clear to Moses that this meant war, that a battle between Jahwe and Amalek was inevitable, even if it resulted in eternal enmity from generation to generation. The oasis they would have to have ; it was their predestined place for growth and consecration.

Moses had his reservations. In his view one of the implications of the invisible god was that one should not covet the house of one's neighbour. He said as much to the youth, but Joshua responded : Kadesh is not, strictly speaking, Amalek's house. He knew his way about not only in space but in historic pasts, and he knew that long ago—though he could not precisely say just when—Kadesh had been inhabited by Hebrew people, and that they had been dispossessed by the people of Amalek. Kadesh was Amalek's property through robbery—and one may rob a robber.

Moses doubted that, but he had his own reasons for believing that Kadesh truly was the property of Jahwe and should belong to those who were allied to him. The place bore the name of Kadesh, which means "sanctuary," not only because of its natural charm but also because it was in a certain sense a sanctuary of the Midianitic Jahwe, whom Moses had recognized as the God of the Fathers. Not far from it, towards the east and towards Edom, lay the mountain Horeb, which Moses had visited from Midian and on whose slope the god had appeared to him in the burning bush. Horeb the mountain was the dwelling-place of Jahwe—at least it was one of them. His original dwelling was Mount Sinai in that range which lay towards midday. Thus between Sinai and Horeb there was a close connection—that is, that they both were Jahwe's dwelling places. You could perhaps name one after the other, you could call Horeb Sinai. And you could call Kadesh what it was actually called because, speaking somewhat loosely, it lay at the foot of the sanctified mountain.

Therefore Moses consented to Joshua's scheme and permitted him to make his preparations for the combat with Amalek.

12

The battle took place—that is a historic fact. It was a bloody, fluctuating battle. But Israel emerged the victor. Moses had given this name Israel, which means “God makes war,” to his people before the battle, to strengthen them. He had explained that it was a very old name which had slipped into oblivion. Jacob, the original father, had first won it, and had thus called his kin. Now indeed it benefitted Moses’s people. The tribe which previously had only loosely held to each other, now that they were all called Israel, fought united under this armoured name. They fought grouped in battle ranks and led by Joshua, the war-worthy youth, and Caleb, his lieutenant.

The people of Amalek had no illusions as to the meaning of the approach of the wanderers. At all times such approaches have only one meaning. Without waiting for the attack on the oasis, they burst in bulging bands into the desert, greater in number than Israel, and better armed. Amid swirling dust, amid tumult and martial cries, the battle began.

It was an uneven battle, uneven also because Joshua's people were troubled by thirst and had eaten nothing but manna for many days. On the other hand, they had Joshua, the clear-seeing youth, who led their movements, and they had Moses, the man of God.

At the beginning of the engagement Moses, together with Aaron, his half brother, and Miriam, the prophetess, retired to a hill from which he could view the field of combat. Virile though he was, his duty was not to do battle. His was a priest's duty, and everyone agreed without hesitancy that that could be his only duty. With raised arms he called to the god, and voiced enflaming words, as "Arise, Jahwe, appear to the myraids, to the thousands of Israelites, so that your enemies shall scatter and those who hate you flee before your sight."

They did not flee nor did they scatter. Or if they did, they did so only in a few places and temporarily. For though Israel was made fierce by thirst and by satiety with manna, Amalek disposed of more "myriads." And, after a brief discouragement, they again and again pressed forward, at times dangerously close to the commanding hill. It clearly appeared that Israel conquered as long as Moses held up his arms in prayer to heaven.

But if he let his arms sink, then Amalek was victorious. Because he could not continuously hold up his arms with his own strength, Aaron and Miriam supported him under the armpits, and even held his arms so that they might remain raised. What that means one can measure by the fact that the battle lasted from morn to evening, and in all this time Moses had to retain his painful position. Judge from that how difficult is the duty assigned to spiritual virility, up there on the hill of prayer—in truth more difficult than the duty of those who hack away below in the turmoil.

Nor was he able to perform this duty all day long. Intermittently, and for a moment only, his helpers had to let down the arms of the master. And immediately this caused much blood and affliction among Jahwe's warriors. Then the arms were again hoisted, and those below took fresh courage. What also helped to veer the battle in their favour was the strategic gift of Joshua. He was a most ingenious apprentice of war, a youth with ideas and vision. He invented manoeuvres which were utterly novel and quite unprecedented, at least in the desert. He was also a commander stoical enough to be able to view with calmness the temporary loss of territory. He assembled

his prize warriors, the carefully chosen destroying angels, on the right flank of the enemy, pushed against this flank determinedly, deflected it, and harried it sufficiently to be victorious in that one spot. It mattered not that the main force of Amalek had the advantage against the ranks of the Hebrews, and storming ahead gained considerable territory from them. Because of the break-through at the flank, Joshua penetrated to the rear of Amalek's force so that now they had to turn around towards him, without being able to cease fighting against the main might of Israel. And they who a moment ago had almost been vanquished now took new courage. With this the Amalekites lost their head and despaired. "Treason," they cried, "all is lost. Do not hope any longer to be victorious! Jahwe is above us, a god of unbounded malice." And with this password of despair; the warriors of Amalek let their swords sink and were overcome.

Only a few succeeded in fleeing north towards their people, where they found refuge with the main tribe. Israel occupied the oasis Kadesh, which proved to be traversed by a broad, rushing stream, rich with nut bushes and fruit trees and filled with bees, song birds, quails, and rabbits. The children

of Amalek who had been left behind in the village tents augmented the number of their own progeny ; the wives of Amalek became Israel's wives and servants.

13

Moses, though his arms hurt him long afterwards, was a happy man. That he remained a much tried man, tried more than all the people on earth, we shall soon see. For the time being he could well be pleased with the state of affairs. The exodus had been successful, Pharaoh's avenging might had drowned in the sea of reeds, the desert voyage was mercifully completed, and the battle for Kadesh had been won with Jahwe's help. Now he stood in all his greatness before his father's kin, in the esteem which springs from success, as "the man Moses who has led us out of Egypt." He needed this esteem to be able to begin his work, the work of cleansing and shaping in the sign of the Invisible One, the work of hewing, chiselling, and forming of the flesh and blood, the work for which he longed. He was happy to have this flesh and blood at last all to himself out in

the open, in the oasis which bore the name "sanctuary." Here was his workplace.

He showed his people a certain mountain which lay towards the east of Kadesh behind the desert. This was Horeb, which one could also call Sinai. Two-thirds of it was overgrown with bushes, but at the summit it was bare, and there was the seat of Jahwe. That this was plausible, for it was a peculiar mountain, distinguished among its neighbours by a cloud which never vanished and which lay like a roof on its peak. During the day this cloud looked grey, but at night it glowed. There, he told the people, on the bushy slope beneath the rocky top, Jahwe had talked to him from the burning thorn bush, and had charged him to lead them out of Egypt. They listened to the tale with fear and trembling. They could not as yet feel reverence or devotion. All of them, even the bearded men, shook at their knees like cowards when he pointed to the mountain with the lasting cloud, and when he taught them that this was the dwelling of the god who was inclined towards them and was to be their sole god. Moses, shaking his fists, scolded them because of their uncouth behaviour, and endeavoured to make them feel more courageous towards Jahwe, and

more intimate with him, by erecting right in their midst, in Kadesh itself, a shrine in his honour.

For Jahwe had a mobile presence. This was another attribute of his invisibility. He dwelt on Sinai, he dwelt on Horeb. And hardly had the people begun to make themselves at home in the camp of the Amalekites when Moses gave him a dwelling even there. It was a tent right next to one's own tent. He called it the meeting or assembly tent, and also the tabernacle. There he housed holy objects which would serve as aids in the service of the Invisible. Most of these objects traced back to the cult of the Midianitic Jahwe as he remembered it. First, a kind of chest carried on poles, on which, according to Moses's explanation (and he was the man to know such things), the invisible divinity was enthroned. This chest they could take along into the field and carry before them in battle, should Amalek approach and endeavour to seek revenge. Next to this chest he kept a brass rod with a serpent's head, also called the "Brass Serpent." This rod commemorated Aaron's well-meant trick before Pharaoh, but with the additional import that it be also the rod which Moses had held over

the sea of reeds to part the waters. He also kept in the tent a satchel called an ephod, from which the oracle lots were drawn. These were the yes and no, the right and wrong, the good and bad, the "Urim and Thummim" judgments which were Jahwe's direct decisions in those difficult disputes which man alone could not solve.

For the most part Moses himself did the judging in Jahwe's stead, in all kinds of controversies and contentions which arose among the people. As a matter of fact, the first thing he did in Kadesh was to erect a tribunal where, on designated days, he passed judgment and settled differences. There, where the strongest spring bubbled, the spring which was already called Me-Meribah, meaning "water of the law," there he pronounced his verdicts and let the holy judgment flow even as the water flowed from the earth. If one considers that there were twelve thousand five hundred souls who looked up to him alone for justice, then one can well imagine how sorely tried was he.

For more and more of them sought their rights and pressed towards his seat near the spring, as the idea of right was something utterly new to these forsaken and lost souls. Up to now they had hardly known that there

was such a thing. Now they learned first that right was directly connected with the invisibility and holiness of God and stood under his protection, and second that the conception of right also included the conception of wrong. The mob could not understand this for a long time. They thought that there, where right was dispensed, everybody had to be in the right. At first they could not and did not want to believe that a person might obtain his right through the very fact that he was judged in the wrong and had to slink away with a long face. Such a man regretted that he had not decided the matter with his adversary as he used to decide in former times, that is, with stone in fist, even if the affair might then have had a different outcome. With difficulty did this man learn from Moses that such an action was offensive to the invisibility of God, and that no one should slink away with a long face if right had declared him wrong. For right was equally beautiful and equally dignified in its holy invisibility whether it said yea or nay to a man.

Thus Moses not only had to pass judgment but to teach judgment. And greatly was he tried. He had studied law in the academy in Thebes, and knew the Egyptian law scrolls

and the Code of Hammurabi, king of the Euphrates. This knowledge helped him to a decision in many a case. For example : if an ox had gored a man or a woman to death, then the ox had to be stoned and his meat could not be eaten. But the owner of the ox was innocent unless he knew that that ox previously was wont to push with his horns and had not kept him in. Then his life was forfeit, except that he could ransom it with thirty shekels of silver. Or if somebody dug a pit and did not cover it properly, so that an ox or an ass fell into it, then the owner of that pit should make restitution in money to the other man for his loss, but the carcass should belong to the first man. Or whatever else occurred in matters of violence, mistreatment of slaves, theft and burglary, destruction of crops, arson, or abuse of confidence. In all these and a hundred other cases Moses passed judgment, leaning on the Code of Hummurabi, and decided what was right and what wrong. But there were too many cases for one judge, and his seat near the spring was overrun. If the master probed the various cases only half-way-conscientiously, he was never finished and had to postpone much. Ever-new problems arose, and he was tried above all people.

14

Therefore, it was a stroke of great good fortune that his brother-in-law, Jethro, came from Midian to visit him at Kadesh and give him good counsel, counsel in such as the overconscientious Moses could never have found for himself. Soon after the arrival in the oasis, Moses had sent to Midian to his brother-in-law for the return of his wife Zipporah and his two sons, who had been entrusted to the safety of Jethro's tent during the Egyptian tribulations. Accommodatingly, Jethro came in person to deliver wife and sons, to embrace Moses, to look around, and to hear from him how everything had gone off.

Jethro was a corpulent sheik with a pleasant mien, with even and deft gestures, a man of the world, a paladin of a civilized, mundane, and experienced people. Received with much splendour, he put up at Moses's hut. There, not without astonishment, he learned how one of his own gods—peculiarly enough, the imageless one—had done so extraordinarily well for Moses and his people, and had, as he

already knew, delivered them from Egypt's power.

"Well, who would have thought it?" he said. "Obviously this god is greater than we suspected, and what you tell me now makes me fear that we have cultivated him too negligently. I shall see to it that we shall accord him more honour in future."

The next day public sacrifices were ordered. Moses arranged these seldom, as he had little use for a custom common to all the people in the world. Sacrifice was not essential, said he, to the Invisible One. "Not offerings do I want," spoke Jahwe, "but that ye shall listen to my voice, and that is the voice of my servant, Moses. Then shall I be your God and ye my people." Nevertheless, this once they did arrange slaughter and burnt offerings in Jahwe's honour as well as to celebrate Jethro's arrival. And again the next day, early in the morning, Moses took his brother-in-law along to the Spring of the Law so that he could attend a court session and observe how Moses sat and judged the people. And the people stood round him from morn to evening, and there was no end to it, no question of being finished.

"Now, let me ask you one thing, my honoured brother-in-law," said the guest when, after the session, he walked home with Moses. "Why do you plague yourself like that? There you sit all alone and all the people stand around you from morn until evening. Why do you do it?"

"I have to," answered Moses. "The people come to me that I may judge one and all and show them the right of God and his laws."

"But, my good friend, how can you be so inefficient?" said Jethro. "Is that the way to govern, and is it right that the ruler should have to work himself to the bone because he does everything himself? It is a shame that you drive yourself so that you can hardly hold your head up. What is more, you lose your voice with all that judging. Nor are the people any less tired. That is no way to begin. As time passes you will not be able to transact all business yourself. Nor is this necessary—listen to my voice. If you act as the delegate of your people before God, and personally bring before him only the most important cases, those cases which concern everybody, that is all you can possibly be expected to do. As for the other cases—well, look around you," said he with easy gestures, "look around

among the mob and search for respectable men, men of some standing, and place them as judges above the people. Let one of these men rule a group of a thousand, another a hundred, still another fifty and even ten, and let them all rule according to the law and tenets which you have set up. Only if it is a great matter should you be called. The lesser questions they can settle themselves ; you do not even need to know about it. That is how we do it, and so shall it be easier for you. I would not to-day have been able to get away to visit you, if I took it into my head that I had to know about everything that is going on and if I burdened myself as you do."

" But the judges will accept gifts," answered Moses with a heavy heart, " and will declare the godless ones in the right. For gifts blind those who see and turn awry the cause of the just."

" I know that," answered Jethro, " I know it quite well. But one has to close one's eyes to that, just a little. Wherever order reigns, wherever law is spoken, wherever judgments are made, they become a little involved through gifts. Does that matter so much ? Look, those who accept presents, they are ordinary folk. But the people themselves are ordinary folk ; therefore they understand the ordinary

and the ordinary is comfortable to the community. Moreover, if a man has been wronged because the judge of the ten has accepted gifts from his godless adversary, then let that man pursue an ordinary process of law. Let him appeal to the judge who rules over the fifty then to the one who rules over the hundred ; and finally, to the one who rules over the thousand : that one gets the most gifts and has therefore the clearest vision. Our man will find his rights with this last judge, that is, if in the meantime the fellow has not wearied of the whole affair."

Thus did Jethro discourse with even gestures, gestures which made life easier if one but saw them. Thus did he show that he was indeed the priest-king of a civilized desert people. With a heavy heart did Moses listen and nod. His was the pliable soul of the lonely spiritual man, the man who nods his head thoughtfully at the cleverness of the world and understands that the world may well be in the right. He followed the counsel of his *deft* brother-in-law —it was absolutely necessary. He appointed lay judges who, according to his tenets, let judgment flow next to the great spring and next to the smaller one. They judged the every day cases (such as if an ass fell into the pit) ; only the capital cases came to Moses, the

priest of God. And the greatest matters were decided by the holy oracles.

Moses no longer had his hands tied with everyday affairs ; his hands were free for the larger work, the work of sculpting for which Joshua, the strategic youth, had won the work-place, Kadesh the oasis. Undoubtedly, the doctrine of right and wrong was one important example of the implications inherent in the invisible God. Yet it was only one example. Much work remained to be done. Mighty and long labour lay ahead, labour which would have to be achieved through anger and patience before the uncouth hordes could be formed into a people who would be more than the usual community to whom the ordinary was comfortable, but would be an extraordinary, a separated people and a unique monument erected to the Invisible One and dedicated to him.

15

The people soon learned what it meant to have fallen into the hands of an angrily patient workman who held himself accountable to an invisible god. They began to realize that that unnatural

suggestion to omit the shout of triumph over the drowning of the enemy was but a beginning, though a portentous beginning, which already lay well within the domain of holiness and purity. It was a beginning which presupposed a certain understanding ; the people would have to acquire that understanding before they could view Moses's command as anything less than unnatural.

What the mob was really like, to what degree it was the rawest of raw material and flesh and blood, lacking the most elementary conception of purity and holiness, how Moses had to begin at the beginning and teach them beginnings, that is to be deduced from the simple precepts with which he started to work and chisel and blast. Not to their comfort, certainly, for the stone does not take sides with the master but against him ; to the stone the first stroke struck to form it appears as a most unnatural action.

Moses, with his wide-set eyes and his flattened nose, was always in their midst, here, there, in this and that encampment. Shaking his broad-wristed fists, he jogged, censured, chided, and churned their existence ; he reproved, chastised, and cleansed, using as his touchstone the invisibility of the God Jahwe

who had led them out of Egypt in order to choose them as his people and make them into a holy people, even as holy as he himself. For the time being they were nothing more than rabble, a fact which they proved by emptying their bodies simply wherever they lay. That was a disgrace and a pestilence. Ye must have a place outside the camp where ye shall go when ye need to. Do ye understand me? And take along a little scoop and dig a pit before ye sit down, and after ye have sat then shall ye cover it. For the Lord your God walks in your camp, therefore your camp must be holy. And that means clean, so that the lord need not hold his nose and turn away from you. For holiness begins with cleanliness, which is purity in the rough, the rough beginning of all purity. Dost thou comprehend this, Ahiman, and thou, wife Naemi? The next time I want to see everybody with that scoop, or ye shall have to reckon with the destroying angel.

Thou must be clean and wash thyself often with live water for the sake of thy health. For without water there is no cleanliness or holiness, and disease is unclean. But if thou thinkest that vulgarity is healthier than clean custom, then thou art an imbecile and thou shalt be visited by jaundice, fig warts, and the

boils of Egypt. If ye do not practice cleanliness, then evil black blains shall grow up in you and the seeds of pestilence shall travel from blood to blood. Learn to distinguish cleanliness from uncleanliness, or else ye shall fail before the Invisible One and ye are nothing but rabble. Therefore if a man or a woman have a cankerous core or an evil fistule, if he suffer with rash or ulcers, then he or she shall be declared unclean and not permitted in the encampment, but shall be put outside, separated in uncleanliness even as the Lord has separated you that ye may become clean. And whatever such an one has touched, on whatever he has lain, the saddle on which he has sat, that shall be burned. But if he has become clean again in separation, then he shall count seven days to make sure that he be truly clean, then he shall bathe thoroughly in water and then may he return.

Distinguish, I say unto you, and be holy before God. For how else can ye be holy as I want you to be? Ye eat everything together without choice or daintiness, and to me who have to watch you that is an abomination. There are certain things that ye may eat and others that ye may not, for ye shall have your pride and your disgust. Those animals which

have cloven hoofs and chew their cud, those ye may eat. But those which chew their cud and divide not the hoof, like the camel, those shall be unclean to you and ye shall not eat them. Notice well: the good camel is not unclean as a living creature of God; it is merely unfit for food, as little fit as the pig, which, though it has cloven hoofs, does not chew its cud. Therefore distinguish! What creatures in the water have fins and scales, those ye may eat, but those which slither in the element without fins or scales, the entire breed of salamanders, they, though they also are from God, ye shall shun as nourishment. Among the birds disdain ye the eagle, the hawk, the osprey, the vulture, and their ilk. Furthermore, all ravens, the ostrich, the night owl, the cuckoo, the screech owl, the swan, the horned owl, the bat, the bittern, the stork, the heron, and the jay, as well as the swallow. Who would eat the weasel, the mouse, the toad, or the hedgehog? Who shall be so gross as to eat the lizard, the mole, and the blindworm—in fact, anything which creeps on the earth and crawls on its belly? But ye do it, and turn your souls into loathsomeness. The one whom I shall next see eating a blindworm I shall deal with so that he will never do it again.

For though one does not die from eating it, though it is not harmful, yet it is reprehensible, and much shall be reprehensible to you. Therefore ye also shall eat no carcass, for that is even harmful.

Thus did he give them precepts of nourishment and circumscribe them in matters of food, though not alone in those. He did likewise in matters of lust and love, for there too were they disorderly in rabble fashion. Ye shall not commit adultery, he told them, for marriage is a holy barrier. But do ye really know what that means : ye shall not commit adultery ? It means a hundred curbs out of regard for the holiness of God. It does not mean only that thou shalt not covet the wife of your neighbour: that is the least. For though ye are living in the flesh, ye are allied in oath to Invisibility. And marriage is the essence of all purity of flesh before God's visage. Therefore thou shalt not take unto thyself a wife and her mother, to name only one example ; that is not seemly. And thou shalt never and under no conditions lie with thy sister so that thou shalt see her shame and she yours. For that is incest. Not even with thine aunt shalt thou lie. That is not worthy of her nor of thyself : thou shalt keep clear from it. If a

woman have a sickness, then thou shalt shun her and not approach the fountain of her blood. And if something shameful should happen to a man in his sleep, then shall he be unclean until the next evening, and he shall bathe carefully in water.

I hear that thou causest thy daughter to be a whore and that thou takest whore money from her? Do this no longer, for if thou perseverest, then shall I let thee be stoned. What art thou thinking of, to sleep with a boy as well as with a woman? That is iniquity and rabble depravity. Both of you shall be put to death. But if somebody consort with an animal, be it man or woman, they shall be completely exterminated, and they and the animal choked to death.

Imagine their bewilderment over all these curbs! At first they felt life would hardly be worth living if they should observe them all. Moses struck at them with the sculptor's chisel so that the chips flew. Deadly serious was he about meting out the chastisements which he had placed on the worse transgressions. And behind his ordinances stood the young Joshua and his destroying angels.

“I am the Lord thy God,” said he, risking the danger that they might in truth take him

for God, " who have led thee out of Egypt and separated thee from all the peoples. Therefore shall ye separate, the clean from the unclean, and not follow in whoredom the other tribes but be holy to me. For I, thy Lord, am holy, and have separated you so that ye shall become mine. Of all the unclean actions the one most unclean is to care for any other god. For I am a jealous god. The most unclean action is to make yourself an image, be it the likeness of a man or a woman, of an ox or a hawk, a fish or a worm. In doing that ye shall become faithless to me, even if the image shall be in my likeness, and thou mightest as well sleep with thy sister or with an animal. Such an action is not far removed and soon follows quite by itself. Take care! I am among you and I see everything. Whosoever shall whore after the animal-and-death gods of Egypt, him shall I drown. I shall drive him into the desert and banish him like an outcast. And the same shall I do with him who sacrifices to the Moloch, whom I know ye still carry in your memory. If ye consume your force in its honour, I shall deem it evil, and heavily shall I deal with you. Nor shalt thou let thy son nor thy daughter walk through fire according to the stupid old custom, nor

shall thou pay attention to the flight of the birds and their cry, nor whisper with fortunetellers, destiny predictors, or augurs, nor shall ye question the dead nor practice magic in my name. If one among you is a scoundrel and takes my name in false testimony, he shall not profit by such tale-bearing, for I shall devour him. It is even magic and abomination to print marks on one's body, to shave one's eyebrows and make cuttings on one's face as a sign of sorrow for the dead—I shall not suffer it."

How great was their bewilderment! They were not even allowed to cut their faces in mourning, not even allowed to tattoo themselves a little bit. They realized now what it meant by the invisibility of God. It meant great privation, this business of being in league with Jahwe. But because behind Moses's prohibition stood the destroying angels, and because nobody wanted to be driven into the desert, that which he prohibited soon appeared to them to be worthy of fear. At first it was fearworthy only in relation to the punishment, but by and by the action itself took on the stamp of evil, and if they committed it they became ill at ease without even thinking of the punishment.

Bridle your hearts, he said to them, and do not cast your eyes on somebody else's possessions. If ye desire them, it soon follows that ye take them, be it through stealthy purloining, which is cowardice, or by killing the other, which is brutality. Jahwe and I do not want you either cowardly or brutal, but ye shall be in the middle between these two ; that means decent. Have ye understood that much ? To steal is slinking wretchedness, but to murder, be it from rage or from greed, or from greedy rage or from raging greed, that is flaming wrong, and against him who shall commit such a wrong shall I set my countenance so that he will not know where to hide himself. For he has shed blood and blood is holy awe and a deep secret, offering for my altar and atonement. Ye shall not eat blood nor any meat in the blood, for blood is mine. And he who is smeared with the blood of human beings, his heart shall sicken in cold terror and I shall drive him that he run away from himself unto the ends of the world. Say ye Amen to that.

And they said Amen, still hoping that with the ban on murder killing alone was meant. For few of them had the desire to kill, and those who did had it only occasionally. But

it turned out that Jahwe gave that word as wide a meaning as he had given the word adultery and that he meant by it all sorts of things, so that "murder" and "killing" began with almost any transgression of the code. Almost every wound which one man inflicted upon another, whether through deceit or through fraud (and almost all of the people hankered a little after deceit and fraud), Jahwe considered bloodshed. They should not deal falsely with one another nor bear false witness against their neighbours, and they should use just weights, and just measures. It was to the highest degree unnatural, and for the time being it was only the natural fear of punishment which gave an aspect of naturalness to all this bidding and forbidding.

That one should honour one's father and mother as Moses demanded, that also had a wider meaning, wider than one suspected at first blush. Whosoever raised his hand against his progenitor and cursed him, well, yes, he should be done away with. But that respect should also be extended to those who merely could be your progenitors. Ye shall arise before a grey head. Ye shall cross your arms and incline your stupid head. Do ye

understand me ? Thus demands the decency of God. The only consolation was that since your neighbour was not permitted to kill you, you had a reasonable prospect of becoming yourself old and grey, so that the others would have to arise before you.

Finally, it appeared that old age was a symbol of what was old in general, everything which did not happen from to-day to to-morrow but which came from long ago : the piously traditional, the custom of the fathers. To that one had to pay the tribute of honour and awe in God. Ye shall keep my sabbaths, the day on which I led you out of Egypt, the day of the unleavened bread, and the day when I rested from the labours of my creation. Ye shall not defile my day with the sweat of your brow : I forbid it. For I have led thee out of the Egyptian house of bondage with mighty hand and with outstretched arm, where thou wert a slave and a work animal. And my day shall be the day of thy freedom, which thou shalt keep holy. Six days shalt thou be a tiller or a ploughmaker or a potter or a coppersmith or a joiner. But on my day shalt thou put on clean garments and thou shalt be nothing, nothing but a human being who raises his eyes to the Invisible.

Thou wert an oppressed servant in the land of Egypt. Think of that in your behaviour towards those who are strangers amongst you : for example, the children of Amalek, whom God gave into your hands. Do not oppress them. Look on them as ye look on yourself and give them equal rights, or I shall crash down upon you. For they too stand under the protection of Jahwe. In short, do not make such a stupid, arrogant distinction between thyself and the others, so that thou thinkest that thou alone art real and thou alone countest while the others are only a semblance. Ye both have life in common, and it is only an accident that thou art not he. Therefore do not love thyself alone but love him in the same way, and do unto him as thou desirest that he do unto you. Be gracious with one another and kiss the tips of your fingers when ye pass each other and bow with civility and speak the greeting, "Be hale and healthy." For it is quite as important that he be healthy as that thou be healthy. And even if it is only formal civility that we do thus and kiss your finger-tips, the gesture does leave something in your heart of that which should be there for your neighbour. To that say ye Amen!

And they all said Amen.

16

Actually, that Amen did not mean very much. They only said it because Moses was the man who had led them successfully out of Egypt, who had drowned Pharaoh's chariots, and had won the battle of Kadesh. It took a long time before what he had taught them, what he enjoined upon them—all those barriers, laws, and prohibitions—sank into their flesh and blood. It was a mighty piece of work which he had undertaken, the work of changing the rabble into a people dedicated to the Lord, and to a clean image which could pass muster before the Invisible. In the sweat of his brow he worked in his workplace, Kadesh. He kept his wide-set eyes on all. He chiselled, blasted, formed, and smoothed the unwilling stone with tenacious patience, with repeated forbearance and frequent forgiving, and also with flaming anger and chastising sternness. Yet often did he almost despair when once again the flesh relapsed into stubbornness and forgetfulness, when once again the people failed to use the scoop, when they ate

blindworms, slept with their sisters or their animals, painted marks upon themselves, crouched with fortune-tellers, slunk towards theft, and killed each other. "O rabble," said he to them, "ye shall see. The Lord shall appear above you and devour you." But to the Lord himself he said, "What shall I do with this flesh and why have you withdrawn your graces from me, that you burden me with a thing I cannot bear? I would rather clean a stable untouched for years by water or spade, I would rather clear a thicket with my bare hands, and turn it into a garden, than to form for you a clean image out of them. Wherefore must I carry these people in my arms as if I had given them birth? I am but half related to them from my father's side; therefore I pray you let me enjoy my life and free me from this task. Or else strangle me rather!"

But God answered Moses out of his inner consciousness with so clear a voice that he could hear it with his ears and he fell upon his face:

"Just because you are only half related to them from the side of the buried one are you the man to form them for me and to raise them to a holy people. For if you were wholly and only one of them, then you could not see them

as they are nor work upon them. Anyway, that you complain to me and wish to excuse yourself from your work is pure affectation. For you know quite well that your work is beginning to take effect. You know that you have already given them a conscience so that they are ill at ease when they do ill. Therefore do not pretend to me that you do not desire your travail. It is my desire, God's desire, which you have, and lacking it you would sicken of life as our people sickened of manna after a few days. Of course, if I decided to strangle you, then yes, then would you be rid of that desire."

The much-troubled Moses understood this, nodded his head at Jahwe's words as he lay there, and stood up once again to his travail. But now he had problems, not only in his capacity as a sculptor of the people ; trouble and grief began to creep into his family life. Anger, envy, and bickering arose around him and there was no peace in his hut. Perhaps it was his own fault, the fault of his senses. For his senses, stirred up by overwork, hung on a Negro girl, the well-known Negro girl.

One knows that at this time he lived with an Ethiopian girl as well as with his wife Zipporah, the mother of his sons. She was a

wench from the land of Kush who as a child had arrived in Egypt, had lived among the Hebrew tribes in Goshen, and had joined the exodus. Undoubtedly she had known many a man, yet Moses now chose her as the companion of his bed. She was a magnificent specimen of her type, with erect breasts, with rolling eyes, thick deep lips, to sink into which may well have been an adventure, and a skin redolent of spice. Moses doted on her mightily ; she was his recreation, and he would not let go of her, though he drew upon himself the enmity of his whole house. Not only his Midianite wife and her sons looked askance at the affair, but also and especially his half-sister Miriam and his half-brother Aaron. Zipporah, who possessed much of the even worldliness of her brother Jethro, got along tolerably well with her rival, particularly since the Ethiopian girl knew how to hide her feminine triumph and conducted herself most subserviently towards her. Zipporah treated the Ethiopian girl more with mockery than hate, and adopted towards Moses a light tone of irony which hid the jealousy she felt. His sons, Gershom and Eliezer, members of Joshua's dashing troop, possessed too much sense of discipline to revolt openly against their father ; yet they let it be

known unmistakably that they were angry and that they were ashamed of him.

Matters stood yet differently with Miriam the prophetess and Aaron the unctuous. Their hatred towards the Ethiopian mistress was more venomous than that of the others, because that hatred was the expression of a deeper and more general grudge which united them against Moses. For a long time now had they envied Moses his intimate relation with God and his spiritual mastery. That he felt himself to be God's elect worker they thought was largely conceit; they deemed themselves just as good as he, perhaps better. To each other they said, "Does the Lord talk only through Moses? Does he not also talk through us? Who is this man Moses? that he has exalted himself above us?" That then was the real cause of the indignation which they manifested towards this affair with the Ethiopian. And every time they noisily reproached their unfortunate brother with the passion of his nights, they soon departed into more general complaints. Soon they would be harping on the injustice which was their fate because of Moses's elevation.

Once as the day was drawing towards an end, they were in his hut; and harassed him in a way

I said they were wont to harass him : the Ethiopian here and the Ethiopian there, and that he was thinking of nothing but her black breasts, and what a scandal it was, what a disgrace to his first wife Zipporah, and what exposure for himself who claimed to be a prince of God and Jahwe's sole mouthpiece on earth

‘Claimed?’ said he. “What God has commanded me to be I am. How ugly of you, how very ugly, that you envy my pleasure and my relaxation on the breasts of the Ethiopian. For it is no sin before God, and there is no prohibition among all the prohibitions which he gave to me which says that one may not lie with an Ethiopian. Not that I know of.”

But they answered that he chose his own prohibitions according to his own tastes, and quite possibly he would soon preach that it was compulsory to lie with Ethiopians. For did he not consider himself Jahwe's sole mouthpiece? The truth was that they, Miriam and Aaron, were the proper children of Amram and the grandchildren of Levi, while he, when all was said and done, was only a foundling from the bulrushes ; he might learn a little humility and not insist quite so much on

his Ethiopian nor ignore their displeasure quite so offhandedly. Such behaviour was proof of his pride and his conceit.

“Who can help it that he is called?” answered he. “Can any man help it if he comes upon the burning thorn bush? Miriam, I have always thought highly of your prophetic gifts and never denied your accomplishments on the timbrel. . . .”

“Then why did you disallow my hymn ‘Steed and Man’ and why did you prohibit me from leading the round dance of the women. You pretended that God forbade his flock to triumph over the downfall of the Egyptians. That was abominable of you.”

“And you, Aaron,” continued the hard-pressed Moses, “you I have employed as the high priest in the tabernacle, and I have entrusted the Chest, the Ephod, and the Brass Serpent unto your care. Thus do I value you.”

“That was the least that you could have done,” answered Aaron. “For without my eloquence could you never have persuaded the people to the cause of Jahwe, nor won them for the exodus. Consider how awkward is your mouth! But now you call yourself the man who has led us out of Egypt! If you really valued us, if you really did not exalt yourself

so arrogantly over your blood relatives, then why do you not pay heed to our words? Why do you remain deaf to our admonition that you imperil our whole tribe with your black paramour? To Zipporah, your Midianite wife, she is a draught as bitter as gall, and you offend all of Midian with your action, so that Jethro your brother-in-law might soon declare war on us—all for the sake of your coloured caprice."

"Jethro," said Moses with restraint, "is an even man of the world who well understands that Zipporah—praised be her name!—no longer can offer the necessary recreation to a highly overworked and heavily burdened man. But the skin of my Ethiopian is like cinnamon and perfume of carnation in my nostrils; all my senses long for her, and therefore I beg of you, my good friends, grant her to me."

But that they did not want to do. They screeched and demanded not only that he should part from the Ethiopian and forbid her his bed, but also that he drive her into the desert without water.

Thereupon veins of anger rose on his forehead and terribly did his fists begin to tremble. But before he could open his mouth to respond,

a very different trembling began—Jahwe interposed and set his visage against the hard-hearted brother and sister, and came to his servant's aid in a way they never forgot. Something frightful, something never before seen, now happened.

17

The foundations trembled. The earth shook, shivered, and swayed under their feet so that they could not stand upright but tottered to and fro in the hut, whose posts seemed to be shaken by giant fists. What had been firm began to waver, not only in one direction but in crooked and dizzying gyrations. It was horrible. At the same time there occurred a subterranean growling and rumbling and a sound from above and from outside like the blare of a great trumpet, followed by a droning, a thundering, and a rustling. It is very strange and peculiarly embarrassing if you are on the point of breaking out into a rage and the Lord takes the words out of your mouth and himself breaks out much more mightily than you yourself could have done it, and shakes the

world where you could only have shaken your fists.

Moses was the least pale with fright, for at all times he was prepared for God. With Aaron and Miriam, who were deathly pale, he rushed out of the house. Then they saw that the earth had opened its jaws and that a great gap yawned right next to their hut. Obviously this rent had been destined for Miriam and Aaron, and had missed them only by a few yards. And they looked towards the mountain in the east behind the desert, Horeb and Sinai—but what was happening on Horeb, what was taking place on Sinai? It stood there enveloped from foot to summit in smoke and flames, and threw glowing crumbs towards heaven, with a far-off sound of fearful crackling. Streams of fire ran down its sides. Its vapour, crossed by lightning, obscured the stars above the desert, and slowly a rain of ashes began to descend upon the oasis Kadesh.

Aaron and Miriam fell upon their foreheads; the cleft destined for them had filled them with terror. This revelation of Jahwe showed them that they had gone too far and had spoken foolishly. Aaron exclaimed :

“ O my master, this woman my sister has jabbered ugly words. Accept my prayer and

let not the sin remain upon her, the sin with which she sinned against the man anointed by the Lord."

Miriam also screamed to Moses and spoke : " Master, it is impossible to speak more foolishly than spoke my brother Aaron. Forgive him and let not the sin remain upon him, so that God may not devour him just because he has twitted you a little about the Ethiopian."

Moses was not quite certain if Jahwe's revelation was really meant for his brother and sister and their lack of love, or if it was the call meant for him, the call for which he had waited hourly, the call that summoned him to commune with God about his people and the work of their education. But he let them suppose what they supposed and answered :

" There, you see. But take courage, children of Amram. I shall put forth a good word for you up there with God on the mountain, whither he calls me. For now you shall see, and all the people shall see, whether your brother has become unmanned by his black infatuation or if the courage of God still dwells in his heart stronger than in other hearts. To the fiery mountain shall I go, quite alone, upward to God, to hear his thoughts and to deal without fear with the fearful one, on

familiar terms, far from the people, but in their cause. For a long time have I known that he wishes to write down all that I have taught you for your salvation into binding words, into an eternal condensation, that I might carry it back to you from his mountain, and that the people may possess it in the tabernacle together with the Chest, the Ephod, and the Brass Serpent. Farewell. I may perish in God's tumult, in the fire of the mountain ; I have to reckon with that. But should I return, then shall I bring out of his thunder the eternal word, God's law."

Such was his firm resolve ; whether for life or death, that had he decided. For in order to root the obdurate, always backsliding rabble in God's morality, in order to make them fear his laws, nothing was more effective than that he, bare and alone, should dare to climb up to Jahwe's terror, up the spewing mountain, and thence carry down the dictates. Then, thought he, would they observe the laws.

When the people came running from all sides to his hut, trembling at the knees, frightened by the signs and by the terrible undulations of the earth, which occurred once and twice again, though weaker, Moses

forbade them their commonplace quaking and admonished them to decent composure. God called him, said he, for their sake, and he was to climb up to Jahwe, up to the summit of the mountain, and bring something back for them, with God's will. They, however, should return to their homes and should prepare for a pilgrimage. They should hold themselves clean and wash their garments and abstain from their wives, and to-morrow they should wander out from Kadesh into the desert near the mountain. There should they encamp and wait for him until he returned from the fearful interview, perhaps bringing something back for them.

And thus it happened, or at least almost thus. Moses in his fashion had only remembered to tell them to wash their garments and to abstain from their wives. Joshua, the strategic youth, had remembered what else was necessary for such an excursion ; with his troop he provided the proper quantities of water and nourishment needful to the thousands in the desert. And he also established a line of communication between Kadesh and the encampment near the mountain. He left Caleb his lieutenant in Kadesh with a police detail to supervise those who could not or would not come along.

When the third day had dawned and all preparations had been made, all the others set out with their carts and their slaughter animals. They journeyed towards the mountain, a journey of a day and still a half. There, at a respectable distance from Jahwe's fuming dwelling, Joshua erected an enclosure. He enjoined the people most strictly, and in Moses's name, not to think of climbing that mountain nor even to set foot upon it. The master alone was privileged to approach so near to God. Moreover, it was highly dangerous, and whoever touched the mountain should be stoned or pierced with the arrow. They took this command in their stride, for rabble has no desire whatever to come all too near to God. To the common man the mountain did not in the least look inviting, neither by day, when Jahwe stood upon it in a thick cloud crossed by lightning, nor certainly by night, when the cloud and the entire summit glowed.

Joshua was extremely proud of the courage of his master, who the very first day and before all the people set out on his way to the mountain, alone and on foot with his pilgrim's staff, provided only with an earthen flask, a few crusts, and some tools, an axe, a chisel, a spade

and a stylus. Very proud was the youth, and pleased at the impression which such holy intrepidity would have to make on the multitude. But anxious was he too about the man he worshipped, and he implored him not to approach too near to Jahwe and to be careful of the hot molten streams which ran down the sides of the mountain. Also, said he, he would visit Moses once or twice and look after him, so that the master would not in God's wilderness lack the simplest necessities.

18

Moses, leaning on his staff, traversed the desert, his wide-set eyes fixed on God's mountain, which was smoking like an oven and spewed forth many times. The mountain was of peculiar shape: it had fissures and veins which seemed to divide it into terraces and which looked like upward-leading paths, though they were not paths, but simply gradations of yellow walls. On the third day, after climbing several foothills, God's delegate arrived at the bare foot of the mountain. Then he began to ascend, his fist grasping the

pilgrim's staff which he set before him. He climbed without path or track many an hour, step by step, higher, always higher, towards God's nearness. He climbed as far as a human being could, for by and by the sulphurous fumes which smelted of hot metals and which filled the air choked him, and he began to cough. He arrived at the topmost fissure and terrace right underneath the summit, where he could have a wide view of the bald and wild mountain ranges on both sides, and out over the desert as far as Kadesh. Closer by he could see the people in their enclosure, far below and small.

Here the coughing Moses found a cave in the mountain wall, a cave with a projecting roof of rock which could protect him from the falling stones and the flowing broth. There he took up his abode and arranged himself to start, after a short breathing spell, the work which God had ordered from him. Under the difficult circumstances—for the metal vapours lay heavily on his breast and made even the water taste of sulphur—this work held him fast up there not less than forty days and forty nights.

But why so long? Idle question! The eternal had to be recorded, the binding word

had to be briefed, God's terse moral law had to be captured and graved into the stone of the mountain, so that Moses might bring it down to the vacillating mob, to the blood of his buried father, down into the encampment where they were waiting. There it was to stand from generation to generation, unbreakable, graved also into their minds and into their flesh and blood, the quintessence of human decency.

From his inner consciousness God directed him to hew two tablets from the rock and to write upon them his dictate, five words on the one and five words on the other, together ten words. It was no easy task to build the two tablets, to smooth them and to shape them into fit receptacles of eternal brevity. For a lone man, even if he had drunk the milk of a mason's daughter, even if he had broad wrists, it was a piece of work subject to many a mishap. Of the forty days it took a quarter. But the actual writing down was a problem the solution of which could well have prolonged the number of Moses's mountain days far over forty.

For in what manner should he write? In the academy of Thebes he had learned the decorative picture writing of Egypt with all its current amendments. He had also learned

the stiffly formal arrow script of Euphrates, in which the kings of the world were wont to exchange their thoughts on fragments of clay. In Midian he had become acquainted with still a third magic method of capturing meaning. This one consisted of eyes, crosses, insets, circles, and variously formed serpentine lines. It was a method used in Sinai which had been copied with desert awkwardness from the Egyptians. Its marks, however, did not represent whole words or word pictures, but only their parts. They denoted syllables which were to be read together.

None of these three methods of fastening thought satisfied him, for the simple reason that each of them was linked to a particular language and was indigenous to that language. Moses realized perfectly well that it would never under any conditions be possible for him to set upon the stone the dictate of ten words either in Babylonian or in Egyptian language, nor yet in the jargon of the Sinai Bedouins. The words on the stone could be only in the language of his father's blood, the very dialect which they spoke and which he himself employed in his teachings. It did not matter whether they would be able to read it or not. In fact, how could they be expected

to read a language which no one could as yet write ? There was no magic symbol at hand to represent and hold fast their speech.

With all his soul Moses wished that there existed such a symbol, one which they could learn to read quickly, very quickly ; one which children, such as they were, could learn in a few days. It followed, then, that somebody could think up and invent such a symbol in a few days, with the help of God's nearness. Yes, because it did not exist, somebody had to think up and invent this new method of writing.

What a pressing and precious task ! He had not considered it in advance, had simply thought of "writing" and had not taken into account that one could not write just like that ! Fired by his fervent search for symbols his people could understand, his head glowed and smoked like an oven and like the summit of the mountain. It seemed to him as if rays emerged from his head, as if horns sprang from his forehead, so great was his wishing exertion. And then a simple, illuminating idea came to him. True, he could not invent signs for all the words used by his kin, nor for the syllables from which they formed their words. Even if the vocabulary of those down

in the enclosure was paltry, yet would it have required too many marks for him to build in the span of his mountain days and also for the others to learn to read quickly. Therefore he thought of something else, and horns stood upon his forehead out of pride over the flash of God's inspiration. He gathered the sounds of the language, those formed by the lips, by the tongue, by the palate, and by the throat ; he put to one side the few open sounds which occurred every so often within the words, which in fact were framed by the others into words. He found that there were not too many of these framing sonant sounds—hardly twenty. If one ascribed definite signs to them, signs which everybody could alike aspirate and respiration, mumble and rumble, gabble and babble, then one could combine these signs into words and word pictures, leaving out the open sounds which followed by themselves. Thus one could form any word one liked, any word which existed, not only in the language of his father's kin, but in all languages—yes, with these signs one could even write Egyptian or Babylonian.

A flash from God. An idea with horns. An idea such as could be expected from the Invisible and the spiritual one, him to whom

the world belonged, him who, though he had chosen those down below as his people, was yet the Lord of all the earth. It was an idea also which was eminently fitting to the next and most pressing purpose for which and out of which it was created : the text of the tablets, the binding briefed text. This text was to be coined first and specifically for the tribe which Moses had led out of Egypt because God and he were inclined towards them. But just as with a handful of these signs all the words of all the languages of all the people could, if need be, be written, just as Jahwe was the God of all the world, so was what Moses meant to brief and write of such a nature that' it could serve as fundamental precept, as the rock of human decency, to all the peoples of the earth.

Moses with his fiery head now experimented with signs loosely related to the marks of the Sinai people as he remembered them. On the wall of the mountain he graved with his stylus the lisping, popping, and smacking, the hissing, and swishing, the humming and murmuring sounds. And when he had all the signs together and could distinguish them with a certain amount of assurance, lo ! with them one could write the whole world, all that

which occupied space and all that which occupied no space, all that was fashioned and all that was thought. In short, all.

He wrote. That is to say, he jabbed, chiselled, and hacked at the brittle stone of the tablets, those tablets which he had hewn laboriously and whose creation went hand in hand with the creation of the letters. No wonder that it took him forty days !

Joshua, his youth, came to see him several times. He brought him water and crusts, without precisely telling the people of his visits. The people thought that Moses lived up there in God's proximity and communed with him quite alone. And Joshua deemed it best to let them believe this. Therefore his visits were short and made by night.

From the dawn of the light of day above Edom to its extinction, Moses sat behind the desert and worked. One has to imagine him as he sat up there with bare shoulders, his breast covered with hair, with his powerful arms which he may have inherited from his ill-used father, with his eyes set far apart, with his flattened nose, with the divided now greying beard—chewing his crust, now and then coughing from the metal vapours of the mountain, hammering, scraping, and polishing

his tablets in the sweat of his brow. He crouched before the tablets propped against the rocky wall, and painstakingly carved the crow's-feet, then traced them with his stylus, and finally graved the omnipotent runes deep into the flatness of the stone.

On one tablet he wrote :

I, Jahwe, am thy God; thou shalt have
no other gods before me.

Thou shalt not make unto thee any
image.

Thou shalt not take my name in vain.

Remember my day, to keep it holy.

Honour thy father and thy mother.

And on the other tablet he wrote :

Thou shalt not murder.

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Thou shalt not steal.

Thou shalt not harm thy neighbour by
false witness.

Thou shalt not cast a covetous eye on
the possessions of thy neighbour.

That is what he wrote, omitting the open sounds which formed themselves. And always it seemed to him as if rays like two horns stood out from the locks of his forehead.

When Joshua came for the last time to the mountain, he remained a little longer, two whole days. For Moses was not finished with his work and they wanted to descend together. The youth admired whole-heartedly what his master had accomplished. He comforted him because a few letters were cracked and unrecognizable in spite of all the love and care which Moses had expended. Joshua assured him that this did no harm to the total impression.

The last thing that Moses did while Joshua looked on was to paint the sunken letters with his blood so that they would stand out better. No other pigment was at hand. Therefore he cut his strong arm with his stylus and smeared the trickling blood into the letters so that they glowed rosily in the stone. When the writing had dried, Moses took one tablet under each arm, gave his pilgrim's staff, with which he had ascended, to the youth, and thus they wandered down from the seat of God towards the encampment of the people near the mountain in the desert.

19

When they had arrived at a certain distance from the encampment, just within hearing distance, a noise penetrated to them, a hollow screeching. They could not account for it. It was Moses who heard it first and Joshua who mentioned it first.

“Do you hear this peculiar clatter,” he asked, “this tumult, this uproar? There is something doing, I think, a brawl, a bout, or I am much mistaken. And it must be violent and general, that we hear it as far as this. If it is what I think it is, then it is good that we come.”

“That we come,” answered Moses, “is good in any case. But as far as I can make out, this is no scuffle and no tussle, but something like a feasting or a dance of triumph. Do you not hear the high-pitched jubilation and clash of timbrels? Joshua, how is it that they celebrate without my permission? Joshua, what has got into them? Let us hurry.”

He grasped his two tablets higher under his arms and strode faster with the puzzled Joshua.

“A dance of triumph . . . a dance of triumph,” he repeated uneasily and finally in open terror. For it appeared all too clearly that this was not an ordinary brawl in which one person lay on top and the other below ; this was a general united carousal. And now it was only a question of what kind of unity it was in which they thus revelled.

Even that question answered itself too soon, if indeed it need ever have been asked. The mess was horrible. As Moses and Joshua passed the high posts of the encampment they saw it in shameless unequivocalness. The people had broken loose. They had thrown off everything that Moses had laid upon them in holiness, all the morality of God. They wallowed in relapse.

Directly behind the portals was a free space which was the assembly place. There things were happening, there they were carrying on, there they wallowed, there they celebrated their miserable liberty. Before the dance they had all stuffed themselves full. One could see that at first glance. Everywhere the place showed the traces of slaughtering and gluttony ? And in whose honour had they sacrificed, slaughtered, and stuffed themselves ? There it stood. In the midst of

barrenness, set on a stone, set on an altar pedestal, an image, a thing made by their hands, an idolatrous mischief, a golden calf.

It was no calf, it was a bull, the real, ordinary stud bull of all the peoples of the world. A calf it is called only because it was no more than medium size, in fact rather less, and also misshapen and ludicrously fashioned; an awkward abomination, yet all too recognizable as a bull.

Around this thing a multitudinous round dance was in progress, a dozen circles of men and women, hand in hand, accompanied by timbrels and by cymbals. Heads were thrown far back, rolling eyes were upturned, knees jerked towards chins; they screeched and they roared and made crass obeisance. In different directions did the dance turn, one shameful circle turning towards the right, another towards the left. In the very centre of the whirlpool, near the calf, Aaron could be seen hopping around in his long-sleeved garment which he used to wear as the guardian of the tabernacle, and which he had gathered high so that he could jig with his long, hairy legs. And Miriam led the women with her timbrel.

But this was only the round dance near the calf. Farther on what was to be expected was taking place. It is difficult to confess how far the people debased themselves. Some ate blindworms, others lay with their sisters and that publicly, in the calf's honour. Others simply squatted and emptied themselves, forgetting the scoop. Men offered their force to the calf. Somewhere someone was cuffing his own mother.

At these gruesome sights, the veins of anger swelled to bursting on Moses's forehead. His face flaming red, he cut his way through the circles of the dancers—straight to the calf, the seed, the fountain, the womb of the crime. Recognizing the master, they gaped with embarrassed grins. High up he lifted one of the tablets of the law with mighty arms, and smashed it down on the ridiculous beast, so that its legs crumbled. Once again did he strike, and with such rage that though the tablet broke into pieces, nothing but a formless mass remained of the thing. Then he swung the second tablet and gave the abomination a final blow, grinding it completely to dust. And because the second tablet remained still intact, he shattered it with a blow on the pedestal. Then he stood still with trembling fists,

and deeply from his breasts he groaned : “ Ye rabble, ye Godforsaken ! There lies what I have carried down from God, what he has written for you with his finger as your talisman against the misery of ignorance. There it lies in ruins near the fragments of your idol. And what shall I now tell my Lord so that he will not devour you ? ”

He saw Aaron the jumper standing near with downcast eyes, and with oily locks at the nape of his neck ; he stood silent and stupid. Moses seized him by his garment, shook him, and spoke : “ Where did the golden Belial come from, this excrescence, and what did the people do to you that you push them to their destruction while I am up on the mountain ? Why do you yourself bray before them in their dance of debauchery ? ”

And Aaron answered, “ O my master, let not your anger be heaped on me and on my sister. We had to give in. You know that the people are evil. They forced us. You were away so long, you remained an eternity on the mountain, so that we all thought that you would never return. Then the people gathered against me and screamed, ‘ Nobody knows what has become of that man Moses,

who has led us out of Egypt. He shall not return. Probably the spewing mouth of the mountain has swallowed him. Arise, make us gods which shall go before us when Amalek comes. We are a people like other peoples, and want to carouse before gods which are like the gods of other peoples ! ' Thus they spoke, master, for if you pardon me, they thought they were rid of you. But now tell me what I could have done when they banded together against me. I asked them to break off the golden earrings from their ears. These I melted in the fire and made a form, and cast the calf as their god."

" It is not even a good likeness of a calf," interposed Moses contemptuously.

" They were in such a hurry," answered Aaron. " The very next day, that is, to-day, they wanted to hold their revels in honour of the sympathetic gods. Therefore I handed over to them the image as it was, a piece of work to which you ought not deny a certain amount of verisimilitude. And they rejoiced and spoke, ' These are your gods Israel, which have led you out of Egypt.' And we built an altar and they offered burnt sacrifices and thank offerings and ate, and after that they played and danced a little."

Moses let him stand there and made his way back to the portal through the scattered circles of dancers. There with Joshua he placed himself beneath the birchen crossbeam and called with all his might :

“ Who is on the Lord’s side, let him come unto me.”

Many came, those who were of sound heart and had not willingly joined the revels. Joshua’s armed troop assembled around him.

“ Ye unfortunate people,” said Moses, “ what have ye done, and how shall I now atone for you before Jahwe, that he shall not blot you out as an incorrigibly stiff-necked people and shall not devour you ? As soon as I turn my back, ye make yourselves a golden Belial. Shame on you and on me ! Do ye see these ruins—I do not mean those of the calf, let the pest take them !—I mean the others ? That is the gift which I had promised you and which I have brought down to you, the eternal condensation, the rock of decency, the ten words which I, in God’s nearness, wrote down in your language and wrote with my blood, with the blood of my father ; with your blood did I write them. Now lies the gift in fragments.”

Then many who heard this wept and there was a great crying in the encampment.

“Perhaps it will be possible to replace them,” said Moses. “For the Lord is patient and of infinite mercy, and forgives missteps and trespasses. But”—he thundered of a sudden, while his blood rose to his head and his veins swelled to bursting—“he lets no one go unpunished. For, says the Lord, I visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation as the jealous God that I am. We shall hold court here,” exclaimed Moses, “and shall order a bloody cleansing. It shall be determined who were the ringleaders who first screamed for golden gods and insolently asserted that the calf has led you out of Egypt, where I alone have done it, says the Lord. They shall all have to deal with the destroying angels, regardless of their rank or person. To death shall they be stoned and shot by the arrow, even if there are three hundred of them. And the others shall strip off their ornaments and mourn until I return—for I shall again ascend the mountain of God, and shall see what in any case I can do for you, ye stiff-necked people.”

20

Moses did not attend the executions which the golden calf had made necessary. That was the business of the dashing Joshua. Moses himself was once again up on the mountain in his cave underneath the rumbling summit. While the people mourned he again remained forty days and forty nights alone among the vapours. But why so long? The answer is thus: not only because Jahwe directed him to form the tablets anew and to write down the dictate afresh—that task went more quickly because he had acquired practice and knew how to write—but also because he had to fight a long fight with the Lord before he would permit the renewal. It was a wrestling in which anger and mercy, fatigue over the work and love for the undertaking, were in turn victorious. Moses had to use much power of persuasion and many clever appeals to prevent God from declaring the covenant broken. For almost did God cast himself loose from the stiff-necked rabble, almost did he smash them as Moses

in flaming anger had smashed the first tablets of the law.

“ I shall not go before them,” said God. “ to lead them into the land of their fathers, Do not ask this of me—I cannot depend upon my patience. I am a jealous God and I flame up, and you shall see one day I shall forget myself and I shall devour them altogether.”

And he proposed to Moses that he would annihilate these people, who were as miscast as the golden calf and as incorrigible. It would be impossible, said he, to raise them into a holy people, and there was nothing left but to consume Israel and rot it out. But of him, Moses, he would make a great nation and live with him in covenant. But this Moses did not want, and he said to him, “ No, Lord,” said he, “ forgive them their sins ; if not, then blot me out of the book also, for I do not wish to survive them. For my part, I wish for no other holy people but them.”

And he appealed to the Lord’s sense of honour and spoke : “ Imagine, holy one, what is going to happen. If you kill these people as one man, then the heathen who shall hear their screams will say, ‘ Bah ! The Lord was

not able to bring the people into the land which he had promised them. He was not powerful enough. Therefore did he slaughter them in the wilderness.' Do you want that said of you by all the peoples of the world? Therefore let the power of the Lord appear great, and be lenient with the missteps of your children according to your mercy."

It was this last argument which won God and decided him towards forgiveness. With the restriction, however, that of this generation none except Joshua and Caleb should ever see the promised land. "Your children," decided the Lord, "I shall lead there. But all those who are above twenty in their age, they shall never see the land. Their bodies shall fall in the desert."

"It is well, Lord, all shall be well," answered Moses. "We shall leave it at that." For because this decision agreed with his and Joshua's purposes, he argued against it no longer. "Now let me renew the tablets," said he, "that I may take your brevity down to the human beings. After all, perhaps it was just as well that I smashed the first in my anger. There were a few misshaped letters in them. I shall now confess to you that I

fleetingly thought of this when I dashed the tablets to pieces."

And again he sat, secretly nourished and succoured by Joshua, and he jabbed and he chiselled, he scraped and he smoothed. Wiping his brow from time to time with the back of his hand, he wrote, hacking and graving the letters into the tablets. They came out a good deal better than the first time. Then again he painted the letters with his blood and descended, the law under his arms.

It was announced to Israel that the mourning had come to an end, and that they again might put on their ornaments, except of course the earrings : these had been used up to bad purpose. And all the people came before Moses that he might hand them what he had brought down, the message of Jahwe from the mountain, the tablets with the ten words.

"Take them, blood of our fathers," said he, "and hold them sacred in the tent of God. But what they tell ye, that hold sacred in your actions. For here is briefed what shall bind you ; here is the divine condensation ; here is the alpha and omega of human behaviour ; here is the rock of decency, which God has inscribed in lapidary writing, using my stylus.

In your language did he write, but in symbols in which if need be all the languages of all peoples could be written. For he is the Lord of all, and therefore is he the Lord of ABC, and his speech, addressed to you, Israel, is at the same time a speech for all.

“ Into the stone of the mountain did I grave the ABC of human behaviour, but it must be graved also into your flesh and blood, Israel. So that he who breaks but one word of the ten commandments shall tremble before his own self and before God and an icy finger shall be laid on his heart, because he has stepped out of God’s confines. I know well and God knows in advance that his commandments will not be obeyed, and they will be transgressed at all times and everywhere. But at least the heart of everyone who breaks them shall turn icy, for the words are written in every man’s flesh and blood and deep within himself he knows that the words are all-valid.

“ But woe to the man who shall arise and speak : ‘ They are no longer valid.’ Woe to him who teaches you : ‘ Arise and get rid of them ! Lie, murder, rob, whore, rape, and deliver your father and mother to the knife. For this is the natural behaviour of human

beings and you shall praise my name because I proclaim natural licence.' Woe to him who erects a calf and speaks : ' This is your god. In his honour do all of this, and whirl around the image I have fashioned in a round dance of debauchery.' He shall be mighty and powerful, he shall sit upon a golden throne, and he shall be looked up to as the wisest of all. For he knows that the inclination of the human heart is evil, even in youth. But that is about all that he will know, and he who knows only that is as stupid as the night and it would be better for him never to have been born. For he knows nothing of the covenant between God and man, a covenant that none may break, neither man nor God, for it is unbreakable. Blood shall flow in torrents because of his black stupidity, so much blood that the redness shall vanish from the cheeks of mankind. But then the people shall hew down the monster—inevitably ; for they can do naught else. And the Lord says, I shall raise my foot and shall trample him into the mire, to the bottom of the earth shall I cast the blasphemer, one hundred and twelve fathoms deep. And man and beast shall describe an arc around the spot into which I have cast him ; and the birds of the

heavens, high in their flight, shall shun the place so that they need not fly over it. And he who shall speak his name, he shall spit towards the four corners of the earth and shall wipe his mouth and say, ' Forfend ! ' That the earth may again be the earth, a vale of want, yes, but not a sty of depravity. To that say ye Amen ! '

And all the people said Amen.

